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BREAD AND SALT

FROM

THE WORD OF GOD

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BREAD AND SALT

FROM

THE WORD OF GOD

In Sixteen Sermons

BY

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PREFACE

NEARLY thirty years have passed away since I received, when Second Preacher at the University of Göttingen, a petition from forty-three students, expressing the wish, which they emphasised by their signatures, that I would print a selection of my sermons. They wished for a permanent memorial of the words they had heard, and felt that in it they would possess a distinct supplement to that which had been offered them in professorial lectures. The difference and the agreement between scientific lectures and sermons seemed also important to them. I could not then resolve to accede to their request, but I promised to bear the suggestion in mind, and if at any time my objections, which were private rather than public, should be overcome, I would take the matter in hand. It is only now that I have been able to redeem my promise. Should this little book fall into the hands of any of those to whom I gave that promise, I greet them in the spirit which united us then, as listeners and preacher, in the confession of grace and truth which are through Jesus Christ.

When choosing a limited number out of the large mass of sermons which I was permitted to preach in

my official capacity before Easter 1877, and since then as a voluntary substitute only, I have given the preference to those which, as far as I can remember, fulfilled their object better than the others, and partly to those which, in accordance with the wish of some members of my audience, had already found a certain, though very limited, circulation. The Fourth Sermon, on John viii. 21–30, appears in print a second time, because the publisher of the collection in which it first appeared, allowed it to be printed, through no fault of mine, with many errors, while he also made unauthorised alterations of his own.

The arrangement of the collection according to the Church's Year commended itself on many grounds. Any other arrangement might have suggested the false idea that it represented a system of my own invention. The choice of texts, too, depends entirely on the Church's Year: partly on the Pericopes of the Ancient Church, partly on the order of Thomasius, partly on a series of Saxon Pericopes.

Finally, the order chosen best fulfils the object for which these sermons are published. One who has been obliged to stay away from Divine service, or who, either alone or with his family, feels the need of a bit of bread or a little grain of salt from the Word of God, is most ready to take up a book of sermons. I wish to spare such an one the trouble of a long search for something suitable for the day.

THEODOR ZAHN.

ERLANGEN.

TRANSLATORS' PREFACE

WE fear that Dr. Zahn's reputation as a scholar is not as widespread in England as it should be, although the University of Cambridge has conferred upon him an honorary degree. This is due, no doubt, to our insular backwardness in the acquiring of other languages. So few of us read German, while almost all German scholars read English. Dr. Zahn's long roll of works includes writings on Ignatius of Antioch, Marcellus of Ancyra, an important series on the History of the Canon of the New Testament, and an Introduction to the New Testament, a translation of which the present Publishers are about to issue, under the auspices of Hartford Theological Seminary. The series is worthily crowned by some volumes in a Commentary on the New Testament of which the veteran professor is editor.

In the sermons before us, intimate knowledge of the New Testament is shown again and again by new light thrown on familiar texts, by insight in the exposition of difficult doctrines. But the chief reason why we desire to bring these sermons within

the reach of English readers, is rather that they may see for themselves how exact and profound learning is compatible with a spirit of childlike reverence and humility, a directness of speech in rebuke of prevalent ungodliness, an ardour of devotion to Christ as the One Master, and to the leading of the Holy Spirit, which are thoroughly in accord with the teaching of the Apostles, and of the Primitive Church. Dr. Zahn is a loyal Lutheran, and we do not agree with all that he has to say. But we thank God that, notwithstanding the divisions of Christendom, fellowship in Christian study is possible, and increasing, and we confidently anticipate that these sermons will promote such study.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Christ's Temptation and Ours. Matt. iv. 1–11 Second Sunday after Epiphany. (Leipsic, 1891.)	1
II.	Calm after Storm. Matt. viii. 23–27 Fourth Sunday after Epiphany. (Leipsic, 1889.)	23
III.	Receive not the Grace of God in vain. 2 Cor. vi. 1–10 Invocavit. (Erlangen, 1879.)	39
IV.	Death in Sin or Death in Grace. John viii. 21–30 Reminiscere. (Erlangen, —)	57
V.	The Great Alternative. Luke xi. 23 Oculi. (Göttingen, 1871.)	73
VI.	The Beauty of Praise. Matt. xxi. 1–9 Palm Sunday. (Ratzeburg, 1895.)	91
VII.	Three Words from the Cross. John xix. 25–30 Good Friday. (Erlangen, 1882.)	107
VIII.	The Promise of Success. John xxi. 1–14 Misericordias. (Erlangen, 1885.)	127
IX.	Strangers and Pilgrims. 1 Pet. ii. 11–18 Jubilate. (Göttingen, 1873.)	147
X.	The Word of Truth. Jas. i. 16–21 Cantate. (Erlangen, 1900.)	167
XI.	Christ's Witnesses. John xv. 26–xvi. 4 Exaudi. (Erlangen, 1889.)	185

CHAP. PAGE

XII. The Water of Life. John vii. 37–39 . . 203
Whitsunday. (Erlangen, 1883.)

XIII. The Good Physician. Matt. ix. 9–13 . . 225
Second Sunday after Trinity. (Erlangen, 1894.)

XIV. True Righteousness. Matt. v. 20–26 . . 245
Sixth Sunday after Trinity. (Erlangen, 1884.)

XV. "He doeth all Things well." Mark vii. 31–37 265
Twelfth Sunday after Trinity. (Ahlbeck, 1884.)

XVI. Freedom from Care. Matt. vi. 24–34 . . 287
Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.

I.

CHRIST'S TEMPTATION AND OURS.

"*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.*"—MATT. *iv.* 1–11.

I.

CHRIST'S TEMPTATION AND OURS.

THE Gospel for this Sunday, which has just been read, is one of the most mysterious passages in the Gospel narrative. Not every one who calls Jesus, Lord, is ready to accept it; yet the Lord is discerned in it, without any hesitation, by all who really know and honour Him—the holy and pure, the humble and strong, the simple and great Son of Man. But how strange the whole narrative is, how absolutely out of the range of our own experience! How repulsive is the company in which we here find Jesus! The devil is a very unedifying apparition, and has been an object of superstitious fear to many generations of men, as well as an object of mockery and the butt of popular wit for centuries past. And how can this gloomy nocturnal scene be suitable for this Epiphany season, when we are accustomed to rejoice in the glory of God, which shines in the face of Jesus Christ, and which shines forth from Him in words and deeds such as Israel, such as the world, had never before seen or heard?

In the old Church Gospels for this season, we were wont to accompany the Lord from His visit to the

Temple, when twelve years old, to the Mount of Transfiguration. We saw Him there in the splendour of His miracles, passing through the varied life of His people, wondered at by all, praised by many, and ever more and more fully and joyfully acknowledged by the faithful as the Saviour of men. In our text for to-day we see Him apart from all human society, with only the sand and stones of the wilderness around Him; and we find Him, denuded of all appearance of glory, a Man suffering from hunger, and then speaking only a few very simple words.

But the question whether Jesus will work a miracle such as becomes the Son of God or not, is the very cause of this conflict. He does no miracle, and is thus victorious over the Evil One. Is not this a manifestation of His glory? Yes, I say, this revelation of our Lord's mind is more necessary and more important for us than His greatest miracles. All the glory of His miraculous life on earth could not help us without the moral strength which He victoriously preserved in His conflict with the tempter. We should never rightly understand the Man, who, at the wedding, turned water into wine, and who fed thousands with bread in the wilderness, if we did not know Him, first of all, as the Man who hungered in the wilderness, and who refused to stir a step without God's command, or to speak one word to provide Himself with bread. The intrepid firmness and the unspotted purity of His will form the centre of all the glory that was manifested in Him. The

devil shall not prevent our recognising this, and none of us need be hindered from rousing ourselves out of the indolence and weakness of our own will and deeds by the repulsive form of the old and wicked Enemy.

My friends, I do not wish to be misunderstood. From time immemorial there have been teachers, both inside the Church and outside the Church, and there are such also at the present day, who preach on the old Bible texts, and take the old sacred words into their mouths, speaking of the Son of God and His miracles, of the Atonement and of the Resurrection, and, if need be, of the devil also; but by it all they mean something quite different from that which Jesus and His apostles, and the community of the faithful, have ever understood by it. May God, in His mercy, preserve this pulpit of St. Paul's, at all times, so that none who are thus double-tongued may ever preach here! I, for my part, have no doubt that the history of the temptation proceeded from Jesus Himself, in whose mouth there was no deceit, and that it has come into our Gospels from the same source. No human witness but Jesus Himself, no other witness ever existed who could tell the story for the first time without making himself ridiculous. I know also that in the course of His later ministry Jesus referred more than once to this His first decisive conflict, and that He then spoke of the strong man who had been overcome and disarmed by one stronger than he. And every one knows that the men in whom Christian

faith in God has proved a power that could move the world, like a Paul or a Luther, have spoken also in grim earnest of Satan's power and guile. But the question as to what we as Christians think of the devil may now be allowed to rest. Even those who think they are freed from the Evil One, by no means deny that evil is a power in the world, and that this power of evil draws near to tempt every one of us; that we have to fight with it as long as we live, and that all that is of any value in our lives, the peace of our souls and our eternal salvation, depends upon our being victorious and not defeated in our conflict with temptation. Whoever is engaged in that conflict does not find the story of the temptation of Jesus quite incomprehensible; it will be good for him to study it deeply. God give us grace that we may do so during this hour! Let us look at Jesus in temptation, let us consider how Jesus fought the fight, which is ordained for us all. We shall see—

That *He was tempted in all points like as we are;*

That *He fought with the weapons which are also at our disposal;*

That *He fought and conquered that we, like Him, may also fight and conquer.*

I.

Jesus had come from His baptism in the Jordan, where He had received consecration and anointing for His calling as Redeemer. The Spirit from on high

which had seized Him must have deeply stirred His soul, and directed all His thoughts to the great work for which He knew He had been chosen, to the glorious goal of the world-embracing work of God, and to the ways and means which would lead to that goal. But yet it was not to the stage of public life that the same Spirit led Him, but to the solitude of the wilderness. The Spirit did not drive Him at first to outward acts, but to communion with self and quiet meditation. As we learn to know the Lord in His later life, we cannot doubt that He was determined from the very first to undertake the work of His life in obedience to His Heavenly Father; that He sought to know the will of God in persevering prayer, and that His resolutions and His prayers were upheld by the belief that God would be with Him in all His ways. But all that is good must also be tried by conflict, that it may be victorious in this wicked world. Thoughts, which could never have arisen of themselves in the pure soul of Jesus, were and are still powerful in the world. If Jesus was to break their destructive power in the world, and to give the sovereignty instead to true and eternal thoughts of God—if He was, in one word, to establish God's kingdom on earth—then such thoughts must rise up against Him, so that He might recognise them as the very opposite of the thoughts of His heart; they must force themselves upon Him that He might banish them.

He had taken no food for forty days and forty nights. The excitement of mind, the lofty thoughts

which had laid hold of Him with new power, communion with God in prayer—all these things had thrust back His bodily wants. But the tension of soul gives way: the body demands its rights; Jesus hungers. And with this every-day matter, which is so natural, the tempter connects his first attack. "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." But lately the cry had resounded in heaven, "This is My beloved Son," and now, like an echo from the abyss, the words come back: "If Thou be the Son." This is the voice of the old tempter: "Hath God said? is it true what God hath said?" Is it not an unbearable contradiction—to be the Son of God, to whom all the world should be subject as their God and Lord, and—to hunger?

It would not have been remarkable if Jesus had endured hunger till He returned to the dwellings of men, where He would be able to find food; if He had done what many a man has done willingly and unwillingly for days together. But the temptation was alluring because Jesus is to be, and will be, the Son of God; the Son of God who must needs be able to deliver Himself from every unworthy position, who could refute every one who doubted His Sonship to God by words of power, and who would assert His own dignity. Yes, He *could* have done it, if it had not been the Holy Ghost who led Him into the wilderness. He *could* have done it, if it had not been His Father in heaven who had allowed Him to hunger, and if He had not been verily the obedient Son, who will do

nothing which He does not recognise as the Father's will, and who, therefore, does nothing without the Father. The caricature of the Sonship of God was intended to mislead Him; but the true Sonship of God led Him to victory. Jesus left the stones lying on the ground and continued to hunger, and thus He vanquished the first temptation, to which we have all more than once succumbed, either in this, or in some other way.

Perhaps there is not one amongst us who knows by personal experience what hunger feels like, and how it can serve as an incentive to the power of temptation. But we all do know that hunger is a mighty power on earth. You surely will not require me to relate fully some of the inhuman deeds to which men have been driven by hunger in extraordinary and terrible situations in life; of the mother who, during the siege of Jerusalem, did not spare her own child, or of the horrible deeds which have come to pass amongst Christian seamen, who have had to wrestle with death from starvation in the wastes of the sea. Rather let us picture to ourselves all that happens daily. I am not referring only to the hungry vagrants who no longer feel any compunction when seizing the goods of others, and who will even commit murder because they are hungry; or of the suicide of whole families because they do not know how they are to feed themselves any longer, or keep themselves warm during a hard winter. Let us think of the large districts in our Fatherland, in which the mass of the

population do not earn enough to provide themselves with wholesome nourishment, and of the connection between hunger and sin, between deserved and undeserved poverty on the one hand, and crime on the other. Then let us think of all that precedes crime, the envy and hatred of the poor, who murmur and curse the well-to-do, as the hungry do the satisfied. The tempter whispers to all who hunger: "Are ye not men as well as the others who are so much better off? And if ye are, if ye are even the children of God as ye were taught at school, then prove your worth, then help yourselves that ye need no longer hunger."

This voice is also heard by those who are not tormented by hunger for bread. Let us think of all that Luther counts up as daily bread in the Catechism. Let us think of all the needs which do not decrease, but increase rather in higher positions in life; of all of which man says: "I cannot do without it, I cannot live without it;" then the circle of the hungry and needy widens out so much that it includes all strata of society. And which of us can say that he does not desire what God has denied; that he has never felt hunger for enjoyment or possession; that he has never yet discontentedly compared his position in life with that of others; that he has only now and then preferred enjoyment to the hard fulfilment of duty; that he does not remember ever having given up his right to his birthright as the firstborn for a mess of pottage? Respectable people like ourselves have no difficulty in keeping our mantle of virtue

tolerably clean; our position in life, the moral laws which hedge in our lives, society where every one is looking at others, and very often all are looking at one—all these things oblige us to keep up to a certain standard. We must go into the wilderness, into the desert where God's eye only sees us. We must prove our virtue if it is to be believed in. But God's eye penetrates into the midst of the crowds of men, through all veils, even to the very bottom of the soul; our hearts lie open to Him, even in their innermost parts, by day and by night, and at the present time. But it is only in the heart of *one* Man that God has been able at all times to read, undimmed and undefaced, the words: "I would rather hunger than do the least thing in opposition to the will of God;" and that is in the heart of His Son Jesus Christ.

He conquered, but the war was not ended by *one* victory. The tempter receives new power over Jesus; he takes Him with him to the Holy City, and places Him on a pinnacle of the Temple, and says to Him: If Thou art the Son of God, prove it; cast Thyself down from this holy height into the depths, into which a man cannot look without feeling dizzy. Is it not enough for the Son of God to have power and to prove it? if piety and trust in God are also necessary, then let Jesus manifest them. Did not God promise that He would give His angels charge to bear up the righteous in their hands lest they should dash their feet against a stone? This was the second temptation. Is it unknown to us? I believe that this

temptation lies very close to those who are not tormented by hunger for bread or any other external need. Men, who are favoured by other men and by circumstances, and who have received all that life can give, are in danger of, and are threatened by, a giddiness which may drag them down into the abyss. Whoever finds life run smoothly, whoever is filled with lofty and happy thoughts—above all the man who seems to succeed in all that he does; the youth, especially, whose limbs move freely and whose pulse beats quickly, is thus tempted when he feels that he must probe life in all its depths and heights, and must learn to know everything by experience. He is enticed by the dangers against which he has been warned. He runs into danger and perishes. The example of those who are more prudent is of no avail; they are only regarded as poor creatures. The warnings of those who have had experience are but seldom attended to; personal experience only makes one here and there more prudent. Neither does a remnant of piety, preserved from childhood, help much. It is so easily confused with natural tendencies, that it only makes them the more dangerous. We do not wish to find fault with the pretty picture in which we see an angel guarding children who are playing on the edge of a precipice; nor with another, where an angel, unseen, guides the children past the precipice by a dizzy path. Still less will we allow ourselves to be deprived of the consolatory promise that God does really give His angels charge to keep the righteous in the most

dangerous paths. We will not allow such words of God to be spoilt for us because the devil quotes them; but we must realise that the devil also takes holy truths into his mouth, and whispers them to us at unseasonable times. We must also ask ourselves who really has the right to comfort himself at all times with the promise of Divine protection. No one dares to do this who is not walking in the ways of God. And where is the man who is always walking in God's ways? Who can always decide clearly between casual security and childlike trust in God? It is true only of the one Man, Jesus Christ.

There is yet a third temptation, which He withstood, and it is also ours. Once more the tempter receives power over the external life of our Lord. He sets Him on the top of a mountain, and conjures up a picture before His eyes, in which all that is great and beautiful, all that has been made by God's creative power and man's art and labour, unite in one glorious whole, and then he says: "All this will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." Jesus gives no answer. He could not say: "Of what concern is the world, and all the glory of the kingdom of the world to Me? I desire them not;" for to Him was due the lordship over all, and it had been promised to Him. Jesus must have known that all that the prophets and poets of the Old Covenant had said and sung of man's position as governor of all creatures, and of the world-wide rule of the King of Israel, referred to Himself, for He knew that God had chosen Him to

be the Founder and King of His eternal kingdom. Jesus knew also, what this community confesses, that history can never reach its goal, and the world can never be at rest, till all the inhabitants of the world bend the knee before Him, and all tongues confess that He is the Lord. The goal of all history is the goal of His own life, and it was this doubly brilliant goal that the tempter set before Him. Only one step was needed, and He would be at the goal. He had only to acknowledge for one moment that the Evil One was the prince of this world, and to do him homage, and then the tempter would abdicate his rule to Him for ever. The words of the tempter were not only foolish deceit and lying. Oh no! a half-truth, which makes the error more powerful and tempting, lies concealed therein. Any one, who has only a slight knowledge of life and history, knows that the world is pervaded throughout by evil powers, and that the men who attain quickly to power and rule in this world never reach their goal unstained, without having done homage to sin; and that, on the other hand, the righteous have much to endure, and must wait a long time. Jesus chose the long and wearisome path of obedience, and said to the tempter, who showed Him the short and easy path to the goal: "Get thee hence, Satan."

And we, how do we act when we are thus tempted? A king of France once said, "Paris is well worth a mass," and he denied the Evangelical faith, which he had heretofore defended. It is not necessary to

be a king to fall so low. Whoever sets before himself a high external aim in life, who desires to gain credit to himself for his gifts and knowledge, and wishes to carry out his own will in the world, will be haunted by the tempter, who dangles the picture of speedy and brilliant results before his eyes, and points to the numbers who have arrived at their goal according to his instructions; while, on the other hand, he shows him the long and fruitless work of the faithful, the self-sacrifice, the misunderstanding, and, finally, the Cross. Only a little homage, a bending of the knee, whether to the mighty ones on earth, or the leading spirits, or possibly the populace—only a little adaptation to the mighty errors of the times, to the prevailing views and customs of the world, and the result is sure to follow: a career is made, and the devil has been proved to be right once more. And yet he has long been condemned. God be thanked; he was conquered for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, who was tempted in all points like as we are, and who conquered the tempter with the weapons which are also at our disposal.

II.

Here we see Jesus wielding no other sword than the Word of God, which has also been given to us; and no other shield than the shield of faith, which is able also to protect us vulnerable men against the attacks of the tempter. Jesus said three times to

the tempter, "It is written," and He strikes the enemy with all the three sayings that He brings into the field, so that he is silenced, and has at last to leave Him. We see here how true it is that "a word can strike him down." But it must be the right word, and it must also come from the heart, as it came from the heart of Jesus Christ. Indeed, this narrative may be very easily misunderstood; viewed superficially, it might seem as though Jesus only repeated a couple of texts that He had learned by heart in school, instead of bringing to original expression the inner strength and truth of His own life. And it is not only here that it seems so. All His sermons in after-times were interwoven with thoughts and words from the Old Testament; and even on the Cross, when stirred to the depths of His soul, He prayed in the words of the Bible. He had learned the Holy Scriptures from His childhood, and many precious texts clung to His memory. He had sat certainly, more than once, amongst the Scribes, and had learned from them by questions and answers. But He never became, like them, a slave to the letter. Even when in the form of a servant, He was not a servant, but the Son. As in the Temple of Jerusalem, so also in the Temple of Nature, in the throngs of men who crowded round Him, and in the barren wilderness, He felt everywhere as a Son in His Father's house. Thus He passed through history and the Holy Scriptures of His people as the Son of the God who had led His

people there and had spoken to His people. He lived and moved in the Scriptures. He recognised Himself in the Scriptures, for they testified of Him, and the same voice of God, which was never silent in His heart, spoke plainly to Him also in the Law and the Prophets. All that God had said there found a clear and loud echo in His soul, and all that filled the heart of the Son was in wonderful harmony with the words of the Father in the Holy Scriptures. Why should not the Son speak in the language of the Father? When He said, "It is written," it was not as though He turned to a dead instrument, or as though He appealed to a law which was strange to Him, under which He stood as a slave; but it was His own inner life, which revealed itself as great and victorious, in this robe of obedience and humility.

The forty days of solitude in the wilderness reminded Him of the forty years during which the forefathers of His people were obliged to wander in the wilderness; when He hungered He remembered that God had provided wonderful food for the starving people, and He remembered the words in which the lesson was summed up that the people were to learn from God's discipline in the wilderness, namely, that it is a small thing for God to provide food when the counsel and help of man have come to nought. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Every one who has not learned this simply by rote,

but has treasured it in his heart, and can speak thus in faith even when he is hungering, will want no other weapon, when tempted in the hour of need to help himself by sin and injustice.

When the tempter tried to lead Jesus astray, and in presumption and self-will to demand miraculous help from God, He remembered again His forefathers in the wilderness, whose carnal minds led them to cry out for signs and wonders, and who had to repent bitterly. Jesus had learned what Israel ought to have learned: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." He stood firmly rooted in this word on the barren height where He had been placed. Dizziness could not affect Him, for by faith He held the invisible hand of His God and Father, and He knew that the power of God is no less strong when it is invisibly upholding and bearing up the great world and individual men, than when it causes the world to marvel by palpable deeds. He relied on this powerful support, and bore witness in humility that He could do nothing, and would do nothing, without Him, with whom He could do all things and dare all things.

Faith, rooted in the Word of God, was also the strength by which Jesus withstood the last attack of the tempter. He did not renounce lordship over all that He had been promised, neither did He deny that evil and the Evil One have great power in this world; but the splendour of the world, inasmuch as it was ruled over by evil, did not dazzle Him; for He knew that this wicked world will vanish away, and only

those who do the will of God would live for ever. This is true of the very least one who desires to save his soul. "For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" But even the Most High, the King of the kingdom, the Son of God, was under the command: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." This law had stood in the Holy Scriptures for many centuries, and it had also been written on the consciences of many thousands of men, but it had not transformed the world. When Jesus, in whose heart it became strength and truth, spoke these words, the devil fled, and the angels came to minister to the Conqueror. The enemy was forced, as he fled, to see the good spirits spreading a table for the Son of God who hungered, and, even now, he must still listen to the song of praise of the congregation: "Thanks be to God, who has given us the victory through Jesus Christ."

III.

Has too much been said? Are we triumphing too soon? A conscientious man who takes this story to heart may well say to himself: These are temptations that have come to me many a time, and have again and again drawn near. How have I withstood them, and how shall I withstand them when they come again to-morrow? Such reflections always sadden us. When we look around, we see many who never seem to fight, but who follow their natural inclinations, and

the customs of the world, without any perceptible resistance; and yet they are baptized Christians, for whom, so it seems, Christ has lived, fought, and conquered in vain. We see others, again, who confess the same Lord with us, and who have, as a matter of principle, renounced the Evil One, and yet we must close our eyes very tightly if we are not to see with sorrow that they never withstand the very simplest trial. We have also known other Christians who seemed to be brave fighters; we have seen them standing firm when others wavered; we have rejoiced over them; we have encouraged ourselves by their courage and strength. But in decisive moments we have seen them bend the knee to the Evil One who has power in the world. It is very saddening, even discouraging. It might almost tempt us to unbelief in the victorious power of truth, and to superstition as to the impossiblity of conquering sin. But for this very reason, I say: "God be praised, that He sent His Son to us, that He might be tempted like as we are, and yet remain free from sin." Let every one who is tempted to despair in the midst of the battle, look, not on himself or his own strength or weakness; not on the thousands who fall on his left, and the ten thousands who fall on his right hand, but let him look at Jesus. "Behold the Man." There He still stands in the midst of history, and, in the midst of the generation now living, asking all: Who can convince Me of sin when I was tempted like as ye are? All who are silenced by this

question, all who acknowledge that Jesus is right, believe in Him already, as their leader in the battle, and in the victory of His cause. They know also that it is not the destiny of man to live on in sinful weakness, and to die conquered by sin, but first of all to fight, and then to conquer under the Captain of salvation. They will also have gained fresh courage for the fight. They do not seek out many inventions to become holy, but they grasp with fresh courage the old weapons, which they, perhaps, had allowed to lie too long and to get rusty, the weapons which Jesus used—the old texts He learned at school, the prayers He was taught by His mother. Strength and skill increase with practice, and faith in victory is already victory, even the victory by which we may overcome the world, and evil in the world.

My friends, let us pray the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation." That is a necessary, I might almost say a natural prayer, and as necessary and as natural as the request for daily bread. We shall gladly pray it from our hearts, whenever we remember the defeats that we and others have suffered. But when we look at the conflict and the victory of Jesus, then another petition rises to our lips, and this prayer shall be my last word:—

If it be Thy holy will, O Father in heaven, that we are to be attacked on all sides and preserved in temptation, then let the image of Thy Son never vanish from our gaze, but help us in all temptation, and lead us out of it by the power of Thy grace. Amen.

II.

CALM AFTER STORM.

"*And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea: and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?*"—MATT. viii. 23–27.

II.

CALM AFTER STORM.

JESUS, with His disciples, in a little ship apparently at the mercy of the tempestuous waves on the lake, but saved from all danger and anxiety by His mighty word: this is the short summary of the narrative. And what is its teaching for us? From time immemorial it has been looked upon as a prophetic picture of the Church of Christ in the course of this world. Though the right limits may often have been exceeded by the play of imagination, the idea is right and true; it is the very kernel of the story. For what took place then on the Lake of Gennesaret is really the experience of the Church, the community of Jesus. The little band of men who were able to manage the ship formed the Church in those days; and it would have been well if the Church, at all times, had remembered her beginning, and had taken to heart the teaching of this story. It is good for us all to remember it now, and to acknowledge that it is our condition which is represented there, that it is our deliverance which is related there, if God is gracious to us. Let us imagine for a moment that what the disciples feared had come true; that the

angry waves had swallowed up the ship, and buried it for ever. Where should we have been now? Certainly, we should never have been Christians. The Churches would never have been built, where the devout, in the long wide naves,[1] can always gather together, and seek rest for their souls in the unrest of this life, consolation in need and trouble, and strength for the fight with the temptations of life. Or, do you imagine that men would ever have preached, all over the world, of a Jesus of Nazareth, who, in the sleep of death, had sunk down to the depths of the sea, as they preach now, and as they always will, of the crucified and risen Saviour? If any man had dared to preach of a man who had been drowned as the Saviour of the world, would he have found faith in the world? No, we, with all that we have and are at its best, were saved on that day, and we can never be saved in any other way. As long as Christians exist on earth who confess Jesus as their Saviour, as long as there are men who feel their need of a Saviour, they will recognise their own position in the story of our Gospel, and see the Deliverer here who alone can help.

But let us also be honest, my beloved, let us openly acknowledge that our natural thoughts, wishes, and aspirations suggest very different ideas when we think either of the whole Church or of our own lives. Did not our Lord Himself speak of His Church as a house which He would establish firmly on a rock? And is now an unsteady fishing-boat to

[1] German, *Schiff* = ship, nave.

be the sole picture of His community? If it were only a stately ship sailing with all sails set over the waves of the sea of the world, instead of a miserable little boat that could be upset by a wave on the little lake! And, as individuals, are we not always considering how we can provide a fixed abode and a safe position for ourselves in this world? Is our condition here to be always like that of the disciples when they tossed to and fro? That is not our idea at all. Neither did it suit the ideas of those who then revered Jesus; but the Lord has not left us in doubt as to the mind which must be in all who wish to have Him as their Saviour. The same evening, a Scribe came to Him after He had already told His disciples to get the ship ready for the voyage, and said to Him: "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." But Jesus answered him: "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." And another man, who was His disciple already, begged that he need not accompany Him this time, but that he might instead be allowed to go and bury his father, who had just died. And Jesus said to him: "Let the dead bury their dead." It cannot be concealed from any one who wishes to be the disciple of Jesus, that he must give up every claim to earthly safety and comfort; and every one who looks upon himself as the disciple of Jesus must be ready also to prove by deed, when required, that fellowship with the Lord is more to him than any other fellowship. We are not told what

became of these two men afterwards, but I know this, and all may learn it by experience, that no man can be as safely protected for time and eternity in a strong fortress in this world, as in the little tossing ship in which Jesus Christ is with us.

If we now follow His call in spirit and accompany Him and His disciples on the voyage, may the merciful and faithful God give His strength and His blessing to us weak ones, that the eternal truth of this story may be transformed into deed and truth in our lives.

The picture, which bears the title

Jesus with His own in the storm,

transforms itself before our eyes into three pictures which appear one after the other. We see in quick succession—

First: *Jesus sleeping and the disciples seized by the terror of death.*

Secondly: *Jesus awaking and rebuking the disciples for their little faith.*

Thirdly: *Jesus rebuking the stormy sea; then there is a great calm.*

I.

Jesus had ended a day of fatiguing labour. Mark tells us that, on that day, the thronging of those who sought help, and of those who wished to hear, had been so great that He had no leisure so much as to eat. They followed Him even into His house at

Capernaum, and He was obliged to help them till late in the evening, healing the sick, disputing with His adversaries, and teaching the people. His own people thought that He had gone out of His mind. But He is always Himself. He needed rest, and on the land He had indeed no place where He could lay His head. So He said to His disciples, "Let us pass over to the other side." He finds the rest that He needed at last in the ship. He sleeps, and rests from His labours. He does not see the disturbance on the face of the waters; He does not hear the wind suddenly beginning to roar, nor the howling of the storm; He does not see the waves dashing into the ship. He sleeps soundly, and rests securely. We read only once in the Gospels that Jesus slept; and although we do not doubt that it happened many thousands of times, yet we should be as sorry to miss in the Holy Scriptures the sacred picture of Jesus sleeping, as we should be to miss those of His hungering, thirsting, and weeping. We see the Son of Man, who had been working with mind and body till He was exhausted, unable to find anywhere a place where He could lay His weary head; and yet He could find it everywhere, for wherever He was, in a house on dry land, or in a ship on the treacherous element of water, everywhere He could lay His head on the bosom and in the arms of His Heavenly Father. Men, otherwise minded, must wake Him, speak to Him, tell him He is in the greatest danger: He sees and yet does not understand all at once. Blessed is the man who can thus

rest, and thus awake, and who, whether sleeping or waking, can trust thus in his God.

Why could not His disciples do so too? There were courageous men among them, and fishermen who knew the lake well, and must certainly have been through many a storm. But habit and natural courage cannot remove the danger, and the danger was great. The ship was filling with water, and every minute it threatened to sink, and there in the stern of the ship, where the steersman generally sits, Jesus was sleeping. They were religious men, aware of something higher than this earthly life; a new world had opened out to them in their fellowship with their Master. They saw a kingdom of God being formed on earth, and they felt that they were citizens of that kingdom, gathered round the heavenly Founder and King of that kingdom. It was only now that life on earth had become of real value to them; it was delightful to walk now in the land of the living, and it would be awful to sink down into death. If only it might be that one could and would sacrifice himself for all, that all might be saved. But to die for no cause, just when they had begun to live a life full of interest and hope, was indeed bitter and awful. And He on whom all depended, for whom it was worth while to live, and to die, was indeed with them, but He shared their danger. The counsel and kingdom of God, man's salvation and blessedness, seemed in danger of being destroyed. But there was one thing still untried. The Man still lived whose destruction would draw all

else after Him. He still lived, but He slept. They awake Him in their terror of death, and cry: "Lord, save us; we perish."

So it is with the community of the Lord in this world, and such also is the experience of every individual Christian. The Church of Christ lives in a world which is not of the same nature as her innermost being. There are times when this unlikeness is not very perceptible. Guided by skilful hands, the little ship glides on securely and unassailed. I do not know that these are the best times. But other times constantly return, when the real nature of the world assaults the Church of Christ with brute force. I do not mean that these are the worst times for the Church. Perhaps they are the times when the Gospel shows its original strength and purity most clearly. But the worst times are those when that comes to pass of which we read in our text: the ship is covered with waves, and then the danger that it will sink is indeed great. I know well, and you all know well too, that the Lord's community is composed at all times of sinful and degraded men, and that it carries about in its own members the evil nature of the world. But it is quite a different matter when this worldliness forces itself violently into the Church, and takes root there. This has happened, and will happen again, at many times and in many ways. In early times it was, and it is still, the love of power, which despises the self-sacrificing service of humble love; or it is the pride of the natural heart, which will

not bend to the Gospel of the undeserved grace of God; or it is a natural mode of thought, which refuses the Gospel of faith, because it is foolish preaching, and which will not rest till another Gospel is preached in the Church, in which there is nothing to believe, and from which there is nothing more to hope. When such powers force their way into the Church, the best Christians are not those who do not hear the storm, and will not see the waves, and whose souls are not overwhelmed by the water. If we have any love for our Church, we are not ashamed if, now and then, the anxiety which the disciples experienced in those days is ours too. But then we must not complain idly of evil times, and inveigh helplessly against the evil world, or grasp at heathenish ways of conjuring the storm. Then we must do what the disciples did in their agony of death. The Lord is still with those who acknowledge Him, and who, nevertheless, have trouble in the world. Now He no longer slumbers and sleeps. And when it may seem as though He slept, when He does not make Himself known by mighty words and mighty deeds to those who cry to Him for help, it is because they have not yet cried in real earnest: "Lord, save us; or we perish."

II.

The Lord allows Himself to be awakened: He raises His head, He sees the uproar of the elements, and the tumult in the minds of His disciples on their

faces pale with terror, and says, as though surprised: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" They knew well why they were in such great trouble, but they could not frame their lips to say it. They were silenced by the accusation, "O ye of little faith." Little faith is not want of faith. It is faith burdened by human weakness. It is faith that does not wish to become want of faith. It was faith that caused the disciples to awaken the sleeping Lord: He was their last hope. And yet, in that moment, it became clear to them that the Lord was right. If they had only had faith, in some degree as great and strong, or shall we say, as childlike and simple as that of Jesus, they would have been constrained to say to themselves that the God, without whose will not a sparrow could fall from the roof, would not allow the Saviour and the salvation of the world, and the community which had gathered round this Saviour, to perish miserably. There is also strong consolation in the Lord's rebuke for those who accept the rebuke, and allow themselves to be guided from all that is uncertain to eternal certainty. There is much that is uncertain in the world, and much that is doubtful even for the disciples of Jesus. But of one thing they may rest assured—in all the storms in the course of this world, the counsel and work of God cannot remain incomplete; the Preserver and the community of those who cleave to Him cannot perish. We will also say it to ourselves when we are over-anxious and afraid about the continuance of true

Christianity in our nation and in all the world. We will allow ourselves to be rebuked but also comforted by the truth to be found in our Lord's answer to our cry for help: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Why are ye so frightened by the godless powers of this passing world, as though they could destroy that to which your own hearts bear witness as God's eternal work and God's eternal truth?

I do not know that this consolation appeals to all. Perhaps there is some one who says: "I do not fear for the Church and Christendom, but for my own soul; how am I to preserve it in the midst of the strife of opinions? I envy those who can find consolation and strength for life in the old Christian faith, but I cannot answer the arguments by which the wisest prove that it is all superstition, for they have the very strongest allies in my judgment and my own observations." Another says, perhaps: "All may be true which Peter, Paul, and Luther and his colleagues believed and fought for against an incredulous world, and which they made the common faith for many generations of men. But if I am to be honest, I must confess that the real world which I see with my eyes, and in which I am firmly rooted by the many threads of my being, is nearer to my heart than the world of faith of which I neither see nor feel anything. I was not by when that wonderful Man drew men into His enchanted circle, and I, the late-born child of this century, cannot boast of exalted revelations, which might have raised me above this

natural world, with all its pleasures and sorrows, its undeniable reality and unquestionable power. And if I were to call upon Him, the Lord of Christendom, He would give me no answer." What can we say to the man who gives way to such stormy thoughts and who doubts his own salvation? I know of only one thing to tell him now: The Lord Jesus Christ answered thee before thou ever thoughtest or couldst have thought of crying to Him for help as the Almighty Deliverer and Saviour. He has also said to thee: "O thou of little faith, wherefore art thou fearful?" Thou sittest in the ship, and He is there also. Thou art in the Church which He has gathered round Him, which He has saved and will save. Other Christians have also suffered from the temptations that thou endurest: O thou of little faith, wherefore art thou so fearful? And the Lord speaks thus also, not only in words that touch our consciences, but also in deeds. Our story is not yet at an end.

III.

"Jesus arose and rebuked the wind and the sea: and there was a great calm." Many storms have risen on that lake since then, and also on other seas, and men have lost heart and have perished. But those who had the Lord Christ with them in the ship, and cried to Him in peril of death, did not perish; they were saved though they seemed at the point of death. The Church, united Christendom,

has also experienced many storms in which she has not perished; neither by the enmity of the mighty and the wise, nor even by the favour of the great who protected her, and the unholy thoughts of the masses which forced their way in: neither by the unfaithfulness of her ministers, nor the weakness of her members. She is still here, the community of the faithful, like the little ship which the waves of the ocean have indeed tossed to and fro, but have never been able to overwhelm. This is a miracle before our eyes as good and great as the miracle that took place on that day. And it is one and the same miracle. It is not the skill and the strength of her members and leaders which have preserved the Church hitherto, and have forced back within their own boundaries the powers of destruction, but the Lord Christ, who is still ever with her, by His Spirit and His gifts, and who rebukes the little faith of the sailors, and who also, every now and then, speaks a word which becomes a deed, so that all the world asks in astonishment: "Who is this Man that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

This story has been continued and often repeated in the course of centuries. But one portion of it is still an unfulfilled prophecy. It has never yet become quite calm, and it never will. The storm which makes even the best Christians afraid, rises again and again, and who can tell how often and how long it may seem as though all were lost? It would be but an idle dream were we to allow ourselves to imagine that

it could ever be otherwise in the course of this world. But it will not go on so for ever without limit or end. Some day the Lord will arise, so that not only His own will hear His voice, but all the world will see Him. Then, when He rebukes the wind and sea, there will be a great calm; and safe in harbour, the community of the saved will praise their Redeemer throughout eternity. Blessed will he be who lives to see it. Do not let us resign ourselves to idle dreams and self-made hopes, but let us hold fast to the hope that Christ has vouched for by word and deed. We are all called: but another end will come first for each one of us. Some day all will be quite calm around us: the calmness of death. We shall lie still, deaf and dumb, and perhaps our dear ones will say of us as we have so often heard it said of others: "How calm and peaceful he looks!" The only question then will be, whether it be the blessed calm which Christ procured and gives to the weary fighter and faithful labourer. The appearance of a dead face gives no answer to this question. It may be that we who are living so peacefully, and who can speak so bravely, may have, on our deathbeds, to withstand a storm of temptation which may seem to question all that we have ever believed during our lives, and that we have confessed before others. But how are we to prepare ourselves? Let us begin at once by taking the dangers seriously which daily threaten our souls; let us learn to cry betimes in every need of our souls: "Lord, help me; or I perish!"

Then we shall also be able in the last dread hour, that may be appointed for us, to whisper this prayer, though in a voice failing in death, and our faithful Lord will hear us. He will rebuke the last heavy storm, and, by His word, will bring us into blessed calm and eternal peace. Amen.

III.

RECEIVE NOT THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN.

"*We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.) Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*"—2 COR. *vi.* 1–10.

III.

THE GRACE OF GOD NOT IN VAIN.

THIS is the first Sunday in Lent, and, in accordance with the directions of our Church, we ought to keep the day as a day for repentance. May God grant us a double measure of grace, that it may be for us not only a day of strict self-examination, but also a beginning of better things, by the help of His Holy Spirit!

Ever since a long series of days was set apart by the Church of Christ as a time of preparation before the celebration of the Death and Resurrection of the Lord, it has been kept as a season for repentance and self-discipline by devout Christians. The Cross, on which our Saviour died, preaches, it is true, repentance to all the world, but more especially to those who know and believe that Jesus gave Himself up to suffering and death for their sins. The only Righteous, the only Holy One, who had no other part in our sin and guilt, but that which He took for sinners in holy, voluntary, self-sacrificing love, was delivered up to death by God. Men put Him to death as a criminal; but what can human wickedness do without God's will! God put Him to death and condemned Him;

and yet He was and He remained the beloved Son of God, with whom the Father was well pleased. The sentence of God which fell upon Him was not His, but that of the men for whom He suffered as their Brother and Fellowman. By the death of Jesus, the severest judgment was passed; yea, a judgment was passed upon the world and upon all natural life in the world which has not yet been atoned for and sanctified by Christ. This judgment of God will never be silenced, and will never be carried out, till all sin has been done away in those for whom Christ suffered and offered up His life. But because we believe in this sacrifice and its power, we do not the less feel the judgment of God that is seen in the death of Christ. No, for that very reason, every participation in the sin, which caused the death of Jesus, only pains us more deeply. Real repentance can only take place where faith exists in the reconciliation of the world on the Cross. It is this faith that first gives us courage to bring all our sin and weakness to God, that He may forgive them, for by it we first realise how much forgiveness is to be found in God.

Now the exhortation, "See that ye receive not the grace of God in vain!" is also addressed to those who hold fast their faith in the reconciliation of the world. We are thus exhorted by the Apostle at the beginning of our text, and he does this by pointing to the Cross; for immediately before our text, he had written the grand words: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses

unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us. We pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled unto God." So, too, the Apostle preached to the heathen, who did not trouble themselves overmuch about sin and righteousness, and yet could not rid themselves of questionings about the unknown God, from whom they had become estranged. So he preached, also, to the Jews, who knew well the God who punished sin, and who yet imagined they might cover their sins with their own righteousness, and who were unable to find peace in the works of the Law. But the Word from the Cross was not only made known to the unreconciled world, in order to tell it that it was reconciled, and to beseech it to accept the peace offered by God. The Word from the Cross had a meaning, also, for those within the community of Jesus Christ; it had further something to say to the individual Christian, who rested in conscious faith on this Word. Therefore the Apostle continues: "But we also admonish you, ye Christians of Corinth who have received the grace of reconciliation. We are not only the ambassadors of God to the unbelieving world, we are also workers together and fellow-labourers with God, in the community of the faithful in whom God has begun His work of grace. We beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain."

Such exhortations were made necessary by the life of the Christians in Corinth; and although Paul does

not go on to tell us in so many words, in our text, all that was condemned by the Cross of Christ in the life of this Christian community, and that was incompatible with the grace received, yet we understand what he means. For, in describing his own and his companions' ministry and conduct during their lives, he draws a picture for us of the form of a human life, in which the grace of God had not been in vain.

My beloved fellow-Christians! we wish to examine ourselves to-day, while listening to the Word from the Cross. This is ultimately a matter which must take place between each individual soul and its God; but still it is our common concern, and one in which we can and ought to help one another. The Apostle, whose words we have gathered together to hear, is a well-tried fellow-worker by the grace of God amongst us. If we do not scorn his help, the grace of God will be with us, and will lead us to fruitful repentance. In order that it may serve to this end, let us consider—

First, *that we may receive the grace of God in vain;* and then—,

Secondly, *let us meditate on the form of that life which does not receive the grace of God in vain.*

I.

It is difficult to think and hard to say, and yet it is true; it must be thought and it must be said, that it is possible to receive even the grace of God in vain. This grace of God which is so firmly rooted in God's

eternal will, and which will last throughout eternity for those who fear God; this grace of God, which was procured for us even before we came into being, which has surrounded us from the day of our baptism, which has outlasted and overcome so much error and transgression, and that has formed and upheld, until now, all that is good and holy in our lives—this holy and eternal power of the love of God for us sinful men, may yet be in vain for us; for we can make its work in and for us of none effect. Even that which is good and holy and powerful in itself, and which, for a time, filled our hearts with the absolute certainty that it was of lasting worth and eternal duration, may yet be useless and in vain. All will at last be useless and in vain that comes and goes, but leaves behind no fruit which will last to eternal life. Therefore an upright man is often obliged to call vain much to which he had clung with his whole soul, and at which he had worked with all his strength. It was of a full and important life that we find the bitter truth proclaimed in Solomon's writings: "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do, and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." And like the Jewish king so judged also that pagan emperor of Rome, who said: "I have been everything, but nothing avails."

We do not applaud when those who have not as yet done much or experienced much, when the young anticipate these bitter truths, and stifle in themselves,

before their time, the delight of being and doing, and we are not inclined hastily to blame those who put their whole energy into the first thing that excites their minds, and who use all their strength to obtain it, as though it were their one and only aim: those reckless men who do not give themselves time to pause for a moment, and to say, when looking back over a portion of their life's work: That also was vanity. It is not merely a delusion which leads us men to be always filling our bottomless barrels, and to be rolling up stones, which always escape from our hands before we reach the top of the hill. It is a divine instinct which bids us wrestle and strive. We should have no incentive to act, if there were nothing which made it worth our while to work and to strive, if there were not an eternity that we must seek for in time, and that we can gain. But a man in whose heart God has awakened thoughts of eternity need not have been the King of Israel or the Emperor of Rome, he need not have a long life, full of useless work and disappointed hopes, behind him, he need only have pondered seriously over a few decades of the life of mankind, and of his own life, to be able to acknowledge: All that man makes and does by himself is vanity, and to most men God's gifts are given in vain. A religious man also confesses: "It is sin which makes everything so vain and useless; it is God's anger with us, for He both knows and punishes our unacknowledged sins. This is why the gifts of God are such transitory blessings. This is why our

labour is so useless, our work so unavailing, our whole lives so fleeting."

But God has looked down upon all this misery with merciful eyes. It is not in vain that He has loved us from all eternity, and that He has so richly blessed us ever since the creation. It is no vain imagination that God again and again causes fresh life to spring up in the emptiness of natural life, and many new powers to quicken, while He bestows such manifold gifts on the children of men. It is not vain illusion and deception when God creates so much that is lovely and beautiful in nature for man, and in art by man, so that the heart of man may forget his misery, not only in vain pleasures, but also in the more serious joys of life. Surely the goodness of God is here. But all these riches of the creative goodness of God are in vain for the children of men when they only serve to hide sin from them, and to help them to forget death; when they do not help them to attain the most important object—that they may examine themselves and repent, and, instead of desiring the blessings of this life, may seek the grace of God which saves from death.

The love which God manifests to the children of men in the realm of His creation would be incomprehensible, if it did not finally reveal itself as grace which saves from sin and death. We know it, as Christians; the grace of God has appeared, it has become a reality in the Son of God, who became our Brother that He might bear the burden of our sins as

His burden, and shed His blood for the forgiveness of many. It is also impossible for a Christian to imagine that the saving grace of God could ever have appeared in vain, that God could have given His Son to the world in vain, or that He could have allowed His intercession for sinners to be unheard. It would be useless for us to rack our brains in investigating this awful possibility. It can never become a reality. All the Christians who have lived as the reconciled children of God, and who have departed in peace, are the fruits of the grace of God which has appeared in Christ. They are now saved, and no evil power can ever make all that God has done for them in vain. And the higher they stood, and the more clearly they acknowledged their condition in the sight of God during the time of their earthly life, the more clearly they testified that they owed all that they were to the grace of God alone. Therefore, at all events, the grace of God is not in vain, and yet all who have been partakers of it are concerned in the earnest entreaty, that they should not receive the grace of the Creator in vain, like so many who do receive the goodness of God in vain. Man may receive much grace, and yet go forth empty. Even the grace of reconciliation may be in vain, in vain even for those in whom its work has been really and successfully begun.

We will not conceal the seriousness of this truth from ourselves. The text does not refer to Christians who were placed under the influence of the grace of God when unconscious children in baptism, and then

were lost in the stream of life, and forgot that they had ever been made Christians. The Apostle is warning confessing Christians. Having grown up in heathenism, they had allowed themselves to be won over by the Word of the Cross, so that they were sorry for their sins, and loved the grace of God, which forgives sins, above all else. They had been reconciled to God, they had found peace in faith in Christ, they had been more richly blessed than other Christian communities with the gifts of knowledge and doctrine. They were diligent church-goers like ourselves; they were communicants like ourselves. What was wanting in them? What made the Apostle so fearful for a community so richly blessed? And what is it which makes the exhortation necessary for the faithful of all times, that they receive not the grace of God in vain? It is the manner of their lives. And it is the manner of our lives that bids us prove ourselves to-day. There can be no question for Evangelical Christians like ourselves as to whether we are saints who deserve heaven, because of our own righteousness, because we feel that we have perfectly fulfilled the law of God, or because we deplore our human weakness a little more or a little less. The only question for us is, whether we carry out in our lives the principles impressed by the word of reconciliation on those who truly believe, and who walk in that faith. See how the Apostle exhorts us. He does not refer to any other word than the word of reconciliation, to which a Christian ought to listen,

and which he ought to follow. He does not preach a new Law as well as the Gospel. He says nothing about works, by which we ought thankfully to respond for the grace given. No, it is the undeserved grace of reconciliation itself that we have to accept aright. The *one* gracious Word of God, the love of God, revealed on the Cross, must do all for us; we must accept it again and again, and allow it to work in us that for which it has the power. Then our lives will also show forth the fruits of grace.

II.

But what is the form which the reconciling grace of God gives to the lives of Christians in the world? We see it in the Apostle, who describes in wonderful antitheses his own conduct and that of his fellow-workers in the world. He does not set himself up as a pattern in this text, but he is a pattern for us. He wishes to say only that he has a right to exhort us not to receive the grace of God in vain. When he promises all God's blessings to those who place themselves under the full operation of the grace of God, he speaks from experience; for him it had not been in vain; and to it he owed all that he was as a Christian and as an Apostle. We see first the minister of the Divine Word, who submitted, in his especial calling, to everything that this calling brought on its followers in the way of suffering and distress. We see there the confessor and martyr, who could not

be brought to silence by force and imprisonment, or even to denial of the truth. We see there the man, who had held a prominent and important position, submitting to all kinds of slander from men, and obliged to console himself with the gracious judgment of God, and with the loving judgment of those who were religiously minded. And, lastly, we see only the Christian as he is in every position of life. Then it flashes upon us that it is the Word of the Cross which gives its peculiar form to the Christian life. Let us hold fast to this.

The Word of the Cross, before all things, makes us the *poor who yet make many rich;* it makes us people *who have nothing and yet possess all things.* Do we recognise ourselves in this picture? There is poverty enough amongst us, and not only poverty amongst those who stretch out their hands to beg. We need not go far to find people wanting what they think needful. Want of spiritual blessings, even to wretchedness, is spread widely enough amongst us. But where are the riches which ought to be united with Christian poverty? the unbounded riches whereof the Apostle speaks; the fulness of blessings which, by overflowing, impart themselves to all who surround their possessor? Perhaps we are not poor enough to live in the midst of such riches. Perhaps we possess too much to be as poor and bare as God would have us. We cling to things which we call our own property, and not least indeed to our mental possessions, to our knowledge and ability, and also to the

position we have, in consequence, acquired amongst men. We make great demands on life, and imagine we are justified in so doing by our position, our endowments, or our achievements. We are offended if what we imagine to be our due does not fall to our lot. But when others make demands on us, there is not sufficient for all. Our time, our strength, our outward means, our intellect, our love—we need them all for ourselves; and even then we have not enough. We wish to be devout Christians while retaining all the ballast of our external and our mental possessions, and also our needs and expectations; and if we were to find ourselves suddenly in difficulties, we should be very glad for the grace of God to supply our need. But the one thing is no more possible than the other. The grace of God will not fill up gaps. It will have free course, and it only gives all to those who have nothing.

Every one who has ever lived through a blessed Lent, and has followed the Saviour in spirit on His way to the Cross, will have been touched in conscience by the words: "If any man will come after Me, and be My disciple, and receive the blessing of My suffering, let him leave all that he hath, let him deny himself, and take up his cross." All earthly possessions after all are but unrighteous mammon; all honour which only comes to us from man is useless honour; and the longing for possessions, honour, and power has always made men the enemies of God. How can we want to hold fast to all these things, if we wish to be reconciled

to God, if we look to the Cross of Christ for forgiveness of our sins and peace of mind? He only who is ready to lay his last penny and his last trinket at the foot of the Cross, so that he has nothing left but a longing after righteousness before God and peace with God, he only can really receive the grace of reconciliation. Though to all appearance he still retains all the earthly goods and faculties that he possessed before, though outwardly he still remains in the position God appointed for him in the world, he is inwardly free and rid of all. All is ignored by him, his goods are a loan, and the only possession left to him is the grace of God. He who is reconciled is content with this, though all else be taken from him. In this he possesses all things; for he can pray to God as a child entreating his Father. All is at his disposal; if he needs it, it must be his. He has always something over for others; and of the riches of his inner life especially, the fulness of spirit and the fulness of love, he can impart something to all who come into contact with him. And if, at the end of his pilgrimage, the Lord, or one of his fellow-Christians, were to ask him: "Hast thou ever been in want? he would answer Never from the bottom of his heart."

But of whom am I speaking, my beloved? Of Paul, or of myself, or of some other Christian? Or of an ideal that has never been seen and never will be seen? When we ask ourselves whether we are amongst the poor who make many rich, our consciences reply: There is nothing to prevent our being such

people. It makes us sorrowful, therefore, when we do not recognise ourselves in this picture of a Christian. But it is not sad that we should be made sorrowful by such a reason. It is the grace of God that makes us sorrowful, and to be sorrowful is an essential feature in the character of the real Christian The Lord said: "Blessed are the sorrowful." And it is in this sense that Paul says, "*sorrowful yet alway rejoicing.*" There is indeed sorrow enough in the world, from the small and trivial vexations of everyday life to consuming heartache and lifelong despair. Therefore no day of repentance, and no Lent, can be needed to provide the necessary amount of melancholy. There is also plenty of gaiety in the world, from the harmless pleasure of children at play to the wild and boisterous extravagances of their elders. But this kind of gaiety and this kind of sorrow exclude each other. They replace each other in sudden alternations. The sorrow is inconsolable, and the gaiety has no stability. The life of a Christian is never completely free from sorrow; but it gives birth again and again to a joy that never dies. A reconciled Christian is constantly repenting; it grieves him daily that he is not more full of love, that he is not stronger and richer in faith, and that through his own fault. It also grieves him to see that sin around him never ceases to deceive, to destroy, and to disfigure all that might be so good and beautiful. He prays daily for the forgiveness of his guilt, and, also daily, that the kingdom of God may come, in which there will be no

more sin to make Christians sorrowful as long as they are in the world. But such sorrow has never made any one too sorrowful, and no one has ever repented of it. It makes room for pure and everlasting joy, and is itself already the beginning of that joy. For is it not holy joy to be freed from self-deceit, and to receive truth instead? to be put to shame by the love of God and Christ, which only condemns us to raise us up again? Oh that the grace of God might make us right sorrowful to-day! We should then go on our way rejoicing. And if God were obliged to chasten us, we should recognise His love therein, which would transform and sanctify us, but would never destroy. *As chastened yet not killed,* as sorrowful yet alway rejoicing, so may we live in good as well as in evil days, if we allow ourselves to be judged by the word of reconciliation.

But one thing more, my beloved! It is possible for a man, who has passed through many days of penance, and who has often gone to confession, to be embittered by the salutary sorrow of repentance, and to find his consolation in the forgiveness of sins lessened when he says to himself: "It is always just the same as of old. I believe as a Christian, and I sin as a man; I repent and receive forgiveness of sins; I seek strength in the Lord's Supper, and then live in weakness again as before. And after this has gone on for a few decades, I shall die; and the clergyman who accompanies me to the grave will praise me as a devout Christian, and a faithful member of the com-

munity. And the world will say of me that I had a good deal of character, because I was always the same, a man of principle, who, however, never made any one uncomfortable, and never offended any one." It is not the fault of the grace of God if that is a Christian's course of life. The Word of God is still living and powerful. It is not only a judge of thoughts, it is also strong enough to carry out its judgments. It can kill and it can make alive again. It can and will kill in us all that makes us sorrowful on a day of repentance, and all that makes our resolutions to improve so powerless in our lives; and it can and will make alive in us all the powers of eternal life that have been planted in us by the grace of God. The grace of God in His word will kill the old man in us, that the new man may grow strong in us and get the mastery. It is only *as dying that, behold, we live.* Therefore, do not let us content ourselves, to-day, with pious thoughts, with the sadness of remorse, with the desire to follow Christ. If the grace of God has helped us thus far, let us hold it fast till it crowns its work in us by abiding blessing. Let us submit to it, till it has destroyed our perverted inclinations and our vain desires, so that they have become as unfamiliar to us as the follies of our past lives. This is a dying before death, certainly often more painful than physical death, but always a blessed dying and an entrance into life. And dying thus, behold, we live! Amen.

IV.

DEATH IN SIN OR DEATH IN GRACE.

"*Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come. Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. They understood not that he spake to them of the Father. Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. As he spake these words, many believed on him.*"—JOHN *viii.* 21–30.

IV.

DEATH IN SIN OR DEATH IN GRACE.

WE are now keeping Lent. The Cross on which Jesus died for our sins is lifted up before our eyes. We do not as yet, in our Sunday services, stand beneath the Cross, but we are on the road which leads to the Cross. In our text for to-day, we see the Lord Himself also walking on this road. Six months have yet to pass before His death. But He had already fixed His eyes on death, as the goal of His earthly life. Jesus spoke quite plainly even to those who were afar off. I go My way. The time will soon come when ye will seek Me in vain. Ye yourselves will lift Me up upon the Cross towards heaven. But God is with Me. I go home to the Father who hath sent Me.

No one who is a disciple of Jesus can ever hear this announcement of the death of Jesus without hearing those other words, which the Lord united with it so often, and in so many ways: Follow Me! Come with Me! Go unto death with Me, that thou mayest gain life. We hear Him saying these words to us even now, in tones of deep and piercing earnestness. Jesus was speaking, not only of His own

departure by death; He was speaking also of the death of those He was addressing. He was speaking of *our* death. We are all on the road to death. Yes, "in the midst of life we are in death." How solemnly this has been brought to our remembrance in our own circle during the last few days! Well or ill, young or old, we know that every hour we leave a bit of the way behind us, and even a child has no doubt that it must at last come to that end. The only question is whether we are travelling on the road with Jesus or without Him; whether we are walking on the road willingly, or struggling helplessly; whether we are keeping the goal in view, or driving away all thoughts of it.

It is as marvellous as it is commonplace, to see how we men come to terms with death. There is no event so universal to man as death; it is a rule which has no exceptions, and which effaces all distinctions. There is also nothing so personal as death, for none can die in union with others. Though I had to wrestle with death in the same place with hundreds of others, and at the same time, my death would still be my own concern. No dying man, no man dying with me, can help me. Life brings us into society with the evil as well as with the good; society thinks for us, its customs rule us. In death every one is thrown back upon himself. It would seem as though every thoughtful man must concern himself with it, must take up a definite position with regard to it, must always arrange his life with reference to death. How

much inclined we are, in other matters, to live for the future, to strive for the future, and to neglect the present in consequence! But the only thing absolutely certain in the future—that we must die sooner or later—most men turn away from as much as they can. We build castles in the air to our heart's content, but we hide the iron gates of death from our view till we stand before them. It is considered improper to speak to any one of the time when he will be no more. Even though a man may occasionally speak of his own death, he avoids it with those most dear to him. How unnatural it seems, and yet how natural! Let us be honest; we all love life, and fear death. No more striking argument can be used against the talk of the frivolous and the proud, who maintain that they have no fear of death, than the scrupulous silence by which they conceal death from themselves and those they hold most dear. From our very birth, and all through our lives, we are all of us, as the Scripture says, slaves to the fear of death; and there is only One who can redeem us from such slavery that we may live in holy freedom. It is Jesus Christ who has trodden the road to death before us and for us. My beloved, are we redeemed, or are we still slaves, chained by that fear of death which makes men all their lifetime subject to bondage?

Do not let us answer hurriedly, but bethink ourselves during this hour. Let us for once meditate on *our passage through life, in the light of Jesus' departure by death.* Let us first ask: *How did Jesus meet death?*

and then let us consider the alternative—*either—or*—in which *Jesus Himself gives us the choice.*

I.

Jesus is more than our example, He is our Redeemer; but He is also our example, and He has become so by the way He went to meet death. But He would have been neither the one nor the other, neither our Saviour, who saves us from death, and the fear of death, nor our example, whom we have to follow in our passage through life to death, if He had not become our Brother, sympathising with us in joy and sorrow, in pain and pleasure, and in fear and hope. Let us thank Him, because He also did not hide His human feelings when He spoke of death. Jesus was much occupied with thoughts of His death. He spoke of it from the very beginning of His public ministry. The Man, after a youth spent in retirement, came forth at last, at thirty years of age, with the consciousness of a mission, transcending all the barriers of human knowledge and human life, and began to speak at once of His violent and no longer distant death. At first He did so enigmatically, then ever plainer. He spoke of it with great dignity and with holy courage; it is not necessary in a Christian community to say that He never spoke of it in the complaining tones of cowardice, or dejectedly, as though unprepared for it. From the first His death had been taken into account in the plan of His

life, for it was in itself a part of the task He must and would carrry out.

But we should be drawing an absolutely untrue picture for ourselves, if we strove to find that the typical grandeur of the mind in which Jesus faced death consisted in fearlessness, in determined courage, and in insensibility to the terrors of death. If in that consisted the true, the really human attitude with regard to death, which is well pleasing to God, we should have to find some other example instead of our Lord; for in this respect others appear almost more sublime than He. With what indifference Socrates took the cup of poison, and watched death drawing nearer and nearer! His last words to his friend were: "We owe the God of healing a sacrifice. Do not forget it!" He meant that death was like recovery from a long illness to him. The Emperor Augustus, in whose reign our Lord was born, said to his friends when on his deathbed, "Have I played my part well?" and then he invited them to applaud him by clapping their hands, as he left the stage. And how many an unknown man has apparently met death with indifference! Criminals have mounted the scaffold with the vanity of dancers, and with unshaken bravado. We have lately read with horror of an instance of this, in all the German newspapers. If any one thinks that this is sublime and great, he will end by marvelling at the death of the malefactor on the cross, at Golgotha, who was ready even in his last agony to scoff at Jesus, with whom he was

crucified, and will set him on a higher level than the Holy One by his side, who gave vent to the anxious question and complaint: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" who confessed to His disciples in the garden, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," and who wrestled in agony with His God, and prayed three times, "Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from Me."

Our Saviour tasted the bitterness of death, and He knew and felt the fear of death. And that, not only on the last day, when death drew near to His soul, but often, when thinking of His death long before. He once said to His disciples, some time before: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" And do we not feel that, underlying His words in our text for to-day, there is a dread of the dark pathway of death? The Lord foresaw, and said beforehand, that the hearers of His words would be His murderers. All would forsake Him. He must tread the dark pathway alone. Therefore He said, in order to encourage Himself: "He that sent Me is with Me." The Father hath never yet forsaken Me. He will not leave me alone; neither will He forsake me when He withdraws His Almighty hand from Me, that I may become the prey of grim death. In the words of our Lord we hear an echo of the Psalmist's old prayer: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." This is the comfort of the holy in the presence of

death, and it was the comfort of the only Holy One when He trod the pathway of death. We need such an example when we are assailed by the fear of death, whenever we think seriously of dying. We need such a Saviour, who has been tempted in all points like as we are, who felt, as we do, how terribly unnatural death is, and who openly acknowledged it, yea, who bore our weakness as His own weakness, and overcame it by faith in the love and faithfulness of His Father. This is truth without the deceptive appearance of art, holy and natural, well pleasing to God, and worthy of man, and that which makes it so comforting is, that it is possible for man.

Jesus knew where He was going when He left the world, He knew that He was returning to His Father's House. No power on earth, no weakness of His own, no alien sin, no death, and no kingdom of death could hold Him fast and hinder Him from entering the heavenly glory that He had with the Father before the world was. Thus He overcame death and the fear of death. The thought of death did not prevent His working as long as it was day. The Jews who heard Him speak so certainly of His death, asked: "Will He kill Himself?" Sorrow and heartache had been caused Him in abundance by those to whom He came. He would indeed have had much to judge and to complain of, if He had wished to speak of all the sin and folly, the wickedness and spiteful contradiction He had met with in the few years of His ministry among His people. It was, humanly speaking, an almost

useless struggle, an unequalled search for love, without any perceptible results.

Jesus felt this sorrow so deeply, because He was burning with love for those who rejected Him. Once He sighed, and complaining even of His disciples, cried out: "How long shall I be with you! how long shall I suffer you!" But that He could ever take His own life could only be imagined by those who did not know His heart. The zeal for the honour of God, which glowed in the heart of Jesus Christ, was pure from all the vain ambition which could make sinning against one's own life seem like the deed of a hero. The love for man, which filled His large heart, was strong in faith that no good could ever be useless, and that nothing true could be transitory. By faith He saw the victory of His work as the completion of His own life. In the love which believes all things and hopes all things, He knew that some even of those who now opposed Him would acknowledge Him after His death and would thank Him for His love. He praised God for every sinner willing to be converted by Him. He rejoiced over every immature soul of man, to whom God's counsel of love had been revealed by Him. Therefore, in patience, yea, with joy, He spake before all the world, even unto the end, of all that He had heard from the Father, and had done in the world, as the Father had commanded Him. Thus Jesus went forth to meet death, thinking often of death, overcoming by faith His natural terror of death, certain by faith of the glorious goal, active in love till

His last breath, and blessed in hope in the midst of this world of sin and of death.

My beloved, let us look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, that we may so pass through life unto death, as to attain life by death.

II.

It is necesssary for us to look unto Him by *faith*, and to order our goings by His, for *otherwise we shall die in our sins*. I know well that this is a hard saying, but it is the word of my Lord, who is Lord of us all. Let philosophers philosophise, let poets romance, let fine orators speak of what they do not know and do not believe! But woe be to the Christian preacher, who here in the pulpit, or by the sick-bed, or at the grave, speaks otherwise than he has heard the Lord Jesus speak. Three times, in our text, the Lord said to the Jews, who did not believe on Him, and the last time very plainly: "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." None of us can die without sin: it cleaves to us as long as we breathe; it makes even those who are sick unto death unwilling to prepare for their last journey. But to live in sin as in our own element, without either hating or condemning it, seeking for release from it or renouncing it, thus to live in it and thus to die in it means sinking down into an abyss, into which no ray of hopeful love can

penetrate, for it is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment.

Jesus is not speaking here of the generations of men who lived before Him, and who never knew of the salvation which had arisen in Him for dying and sinful men. He is not speaking either of the countless millions who were then living far from Him without even hearing of Him. He is speaking only of those, and to those, who hear His Word and refuse to believe in Him. But even so this Word is a two-edged sword, which pierces through joint and marrow. All those whom we follow to the grave have heard the Word of Jesus, at all events, in their youth; they have heard the church-bells all their lives; they have known of the existence of a community of the faithful, and they have desired to be buried in their churchyard. They are therefore all concerned in the great alternative: *Either* they have died in faith in the Vanquisher of death, *or* they have died in their sins. Again—the living that we meet daily, have they not nearly all been baptised and confirmed, and have they not been hearers of the words of Jesus, and have remained so for a time? And they are all on the same road with us, of which the goal for some is dying in their own sins, and for the others, dying in faith in the Son of God. But the death is in accordance with the life which preceded it. Who is there amongst us who has not in this world, and in the world beyond, many very closely connected, perhaps very amiable and dear ones, with reference to whom this

great alternative—either—or—makes him tremble? As men, we do not know the hearts of men, but we should have neither heart nor understanding if, when desiring to be Christians ourselves, we did not often look around on our so-called Christian surroundings with the deepest grief. How many Christians there are, travelling through this short life towards certain death, who only remind us now and then by some trait or other in their character of our great Pattern; who though often thinking of death, certain of a blessed end, and overcoming by faith the fear of death, work unweariedly as long as it is day! On the other hand, how many we see who are slaves to the fear of death, hiding their faces from the King of Terrors till extreme old age, and striving vainly to flee from him! How few there are who, free as the children of God, seek their Father's face at all times, as long as they are here below, and then show their joy to enter into their Father's House, as soon as their Father calls them to Himself!

But nearer than our nearest friends, our old parents and our young children, nearer than all others are we to ourselves. How do we then, who are gathered here, stand in relation to the holy Pattern set before us to-day? Every one, with any sense, will allow that it would be extreme folly to live as though there were no death. Every one will allow that it is useless, and even harmful, to be afraid of death and to flee from it. And who does not feel that it is grand and dignified, yea, even glorious and enviable,

to pass through life and to meet death as Jesus did? I maintain that there is not one amongst us who can gaze attentively for some time on this picture of a holy and yet truly human life, without the thought arising in his heart: "Oh, who would not so live, so go to meet death, and so die like Jesus!"

But there is something in His own words which will scare away the hope that we can ever be like this picture of Him. For on what does Jesus ground the certainty that His death must lead to His exaltation to heavenly glory? He said to the Jews: "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world." And on what does He ground His faith that God would not forsake Him in the terrors of the last conflict with death? He could say, and He also did say: "I do alway those things that please God." But this is just what none of us can repeat after Him without lying; and the picture which drew us on by its beauty seems now to drive us away, and even to vanish away itself in unattainable distance. But this is not the fault of the Lord who speaks to us to-day, and who asks us whether we will die in our sins, or die and live with Him. He does not threaten in order to drive us away, but only to show us how needful it is to cleave to Him. He says: "If ye *believe* not that I am He, ye will die in your sins." By this He would also say, and did say, even to His murderers, "*Only believe.*" His love indeed hoped that many of them would confess Him, when He had gone His way

even unto the end. And this bold hope began to fulfil itself from that same hour. These very words of His convinced many. We read at the end of our text: "As He spake these words many believed on Him." Faith bridges the chasm which separates us sinful mortals from the heavenly Son of God; and not some peculiar kind of faith that we invent for ourselves, but faith in Him, who has shown Himself so worthy of faith, gives us strength to follow Him. Without faith in the truth of our ideal, there can be no striving, in any province of human life, which will bring us nearer to our pattern, but only dreams and fancies which are even more fleeting than this life. But why should any one wish to refuse faith to the sacred Pattern and Example, called Jesus Christ? This is no phantom, an invention of man's imagination. It is a living Man who bids us follow Him. His heart is full of love for the slaves of sin and death. It is His mouth in which there was no deceit and guile, which cries to us: Believe only, and follow Me; then ye will not die in your sins, but live while dying.

> "Is it too hard for thee
> To tread where I have trod?
> Smoothing the way to God,
> Ready thine aid to be."

Yes, He has led the way; not only going before, but also for us He has fought the fight of life and the fight of death, and has conquered. The true Man, who, as our Example, cries to us to follow after Him,

is also the Son of God, who came down from above into our poor sick and erring life. If it were not so, He would not be the holy and true Man to whom we can look up in faith and trust. But now the Son of God, the free-born, has allowed our chains to be laid upon Him; He has borne them in patience and faith that He might then break them by the might of His indissoluble Divine life. We can also follow Him even unto death, for He went on our way as a Man who had tasted the fear and bitterness of death. And we can believe on Him, for, because He was from above, and never denied His heavenly descent in thought, word, or deed, the door of His Father's House was obliged to open to Him when He returned home. Whosoever believeth in Him must cling to Him in life, and this is not so hard as it seems to those who as yet have never tried it. For the Lord Jesus, the free-born Son of God, remembers, in *His* Father's House, His brethren in a strange land, whom He has made the children of God, and He considers how He may make them yet more fully the free children of God. He holds us fast when all else forsakes us. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. Whoever so lives, lives well; whoever so dies, in dying is blessed. Amen.

V.

THE GREAT ALTERNATIVE.

"*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*"—LUKE *xi.* 23.

V.

FOR OR AGAINST CHRIST.

A WEEK without a Sunday, and work without rest or holidays, would indeed be slavery. Sunday has, therefore, been rightly extolled as the protector of liberty, especially for those who earn their living by manual labour. We who are living in a University, that we may teach and learn, find a like blessing in the beneficial interchange of public work and work in common and rest at home, into which our years are divided, and the coming and going, by which to a certain extent our circle is broken up, only that it may be reunited after the lapse of a few months. We must not merely enjoy this privilege, we must also profit by it in good earnest. Though we may sometimes feel sad because some are leaving us never to return,—I do not know whether this applies to any amongst us to-day,—yet, on the whole, these changes are constantly introducing fresh life amongst us, and they secure our freedom from the indolent and deadening habits to which even mental work may fall a prey. In order that we may be preserved from this, and be really able to begin anew, wherever it is the will of God that we should continue our lives, and take up

our work again, we must make good use of the time given us for rest, and examine ourselves and our lives. Where are we? what are we doing? what do we want to do? and what forces us into action? We ought often thus to question ourselves, that our lives, in all their varied multiplicity of thought, may not at last become thoughtless, and, in spite of their activity, may not end in useless and purposeless drifting. Such an examination in the light of the Divine Word is always a solemn matter; it is doubly solemn at this season, when every Sunday we cry to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who, though guiltless, was put to death on the Cross, for His mercy and peace. We must find out our bearings by the Cross which is lifted up before us; and we will not let it out of our sight to-day, though we are going to meditate on a text of Scripture which does not refer to it. A few words from the Gospel for the day shall serve as our text.

"*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*"—Luke xi. 23.

In these words our Lord asserts a universal rule. He places before all men, in order to try to warn, and to force them to decide, a definite alternative from which there can be no escape. This alternative was set before us long ago; it is always before us, morning, noon, and night; it will resound through all history and all nations, through all communities and all homes, till the question has been answered with Yes or No by all to whom it is addressed.

Jesus requires all men to take His part, and to gather with Him, because He came for all men, and because the work of His life is the one great work of God, to which all human work must be subordinated, and with which it must be united that it may be well pleasing to God. He also enforced His demand, and thus proved His right to speak, as only He who had the right could speak without blasphemous presumption. When He spake these words, He was surrounded by people of all sorts. A sick man was there, the string of whose tongue He had loosed by His word; many were there who wondered and held their peace. Some were there who strove to explain His power of working miracles as a devilish power. Others, to whom this explanation seemed at least premature, required of Him a sign from heaven, as an undeniable proof that He spoke and acted in covenant with God. A woman was there who called the mother blessed who had borne such a son as Jesus. The disciples of Jesus were also present who had long been with Him, and who had already begun to work with Him in gathering together the community of the kingdom of God. But all these followers did not satisfy the Lord; He must be more than a marvellous man, whose wonderful appearance might be explained in many ways, whose entrancing speech made men marvel, and whose actions none really dared to blame; who was followed by some who trusted in Him as their Guide, whilst others sought for reasons for turning their backs upon Him. Their enmity was still

too cold for Him, their friendship too lukewarm. It must be made manifest that none might pass Him by, but that all must take up a definite position with regard to Him; for life and salvation depended upon being on His side.

Even during His work on earth, Jesus forced men to decide either for or against Him. Because He never ceased testifying that the works of men were evil, and that only in Him, and by His mediation, forgiveness of sins, peace of mind, and eternal life were to be found, His opponents, who had been disputing so coldly and deliberately, became His furious enemies. When they had brought Him to the Cross, by straining the law, and misusing their magisterial authority, they imagined that they had been victorious over Him, but even then He showed Himself victorious over His enemies by forcing them to listen, and to decide either for or against Him. Even His friends, whose hearts had already gone out to Him, had still to learn what it meant to be with Jesus, and also for Jesus, in violent opposition to the majority and the leading members of their nation. And when many of His disciples forsook Him, and He asked the Twelve if they would also forsake Him, Peter answered in all sincerity, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" And when Jesus put an end to all the entreaties and warnings of His apostles by the decisive words, "Let us go into Judæa," Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." It is true that an hour came when they all forsook Him; Jesus had to mourn

that, even in His last night, the most faithful could not watch and pray with Him for one hour. He must needs at last be left alone, so that it might be made plain for all time that, without stifling His love or bending His faithful obedience, the whole burden of the sin of the world was laid on Him alone. Jesus had no fellow-worker, no companion, save His Heavenly Father, in suffering and in death. And yet He enforced His demand on His disciples. Though some fled and others denied Him, though all doubted, trembled, and mourned, there was never any hesitation on the part of any of them, as to whether they would be for or against Him. With the exception of the son of perdition who betrayed Him, the hearts of all the disciples remained true to Him in the warmest love, and, in spite of all the weakness of the flesh, a willing spirit never failed them. The bitter tears of Peter, which immediately followed his denial, the weeping of Mary Magdalene at the open grave, the burning hearts of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, all prove, as much as the mocking laughter under the Cross and the despair of Judas, that at last it was impossible to stand in the presence of Jesus on debatable ground. He enforced His alternative. He, at whose birth the angels sang "Peace on earth," said also, that He had not come to bring peace, but a sword. He who had come to gather together the scattered children of God, had brought about an incurable division in His own nation; yea, He had set father and son, mother and daughter, against each

other. He had formed two parties between whom there would be ever less and less possibility of reconciliation. Worship here, blasphemy there; faith, hope, and love here; hatred, despair, and destruction there: this was the result of His imperative demand that all must decide either for or against Him.

Jesus still makes the same demand. He wills that all should take His side, that not one should be His enemy. And let none of you say that it is unnecessary to bring this demand to remembrance in a Christian community, gathered together to hear His Word. If in this so-called Christian world we could ask all if they were for or against Jesus, and then could count votes, two out of every three would refrain from voting. Some would say they felt no inclination to give a decisive answer to this difficult and complicated question. Others would reply that this question had long ago been answered for every one acquainted with history, and it had therefore been struck off the order of the day. The history of humanity, dating from the birth of Christ, had decided for Christ, and the only way in which any sensible man could oppose Him was by opposing the foolish conclusions and exaggerated judgments of His worshippers. But even this was not such a very urgent task. The enthusiasm of the early Christians, the fanatical and almost idolatrous worship of the irresistible Leader, and the child-like trust in His power as able to control the powers of nature, had been gradually cooled and moderated by the progress of mental development. It was

natural that, while He was on earth, the great Worker of miracles should be the object of the adoring admiration of some, and the deadly hatred of others. Since He has passed away and His supposed miracles have been withdrawn from the critical verdict of man's intellect, there is no longer any question as to the Person of Jesus, but only as to the lasting result of His work, and that is an incitement to a purified religion and an abstract morality for which there is cause for thankfulness. The precepts of the Sermon on the Mount are the kernel of the Gospel; all else is but the shell which has long been broken and cast aside by all sensible persons.

But the Lord will not be set aside by such words. He Himself is the Kernel of this Gospel. It is not the enthusiasm of the ignorant worshippers whom He had already found during His life on earth, and in still greater numbers after His death; it is not the Confession of the Church "nor her dogmas," nor the Christian Services and their superabundant forms, but it is Jesus Himself, the humble Preacher of the Gospel, who requires men to decide either for or against His Person. It does not suffice Him that all other men should follow His example, trusting in God and living and working in the world, as He believed, loved, and worked before them; He knows that no man can do this. He requires all men to be with Him, and to live and work in fellowship with Him. Therefore, till the kingdom of God, which Jesus preached and founded, has become an obvious fact,

the question will remain on the order of the day, whether we are for Him and gathering with Him, or whether we are against Him, and hindering and destroying His work with all our might.

There are many other questions which lead men to form themselves into parties, questions which often are only of consequence for a year or two; then they are succeeded by others which are quite as exciting, and men are as ready as ever to take sides. Amongst these questions there are some that are very difficult and complicated, and people who lack every quality which would enable them to give a weighty answer, are expected to give their opinions and record their votes. But the great question which Jesus raised is no longer to be on the order of the day. The division of parties that Jesus caused, the opposition between the friends and companions of Jesus and His enemies and opponents, is no longer to be a question on which men must divide; it is no longer to inflame hearts, and to lay claim to hands and mouths. Do not let us allow ourselves to be led astray by men's idle talk, however loud it may be, nor by their silence, however dignified it may seem. They can no more silence our Lord Christ whom we confess, than they can succeed in ridding the world of the great alternative with reference to His Person. The rent that Jesus made cannot be mended till He comes again and acknowledges His own who have acknowledged Him. While on the surface of life in the world, in the Reichstag and other parliamentary

assemblies, in learned and unlearned books and papers, party-fights are being carried on in which Jesus and His Gospel seem to have no part, deep down, beneath it all, there lies the one antagonism, which Jesus created, between the men who take His side that He may be on their side, and those who are against Him, because His fellowship is painful and wearisome to them.

If it had only been a question whether Jesus was a tempter and destroyer, or the benefactor and Saviour of His people, whether His death on the Cross was a shameful defeat or a glorious victory, then indeed it would be no longer necessary for us to take His side, and give Him glory. We should be giving Him nothing thereby that He did not already possess, and we should not be able to change the views of His enemies. Jesus does not indeed require our fellowship for His own sake, but for ours. When He trod the most difficult road, on which all forsook Him, He said to His disciples: "Ye leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." In life, as in suffering, He did not think of His own safety and glory, but of the salvation of lost mankind and the restoration of their lost glory. If He found it needful, now and then, to assert that He did not seek His own glory, and desired neither the testimony nor the help of man, it would be superfluous to do so now, for He has long since passed from man's judgment, and is exalted by God over all the power of His enemies. But now, as then, He requires men to take His side,

because through Him alone salvation is to be found from the sin which separates them from God, and from death, the wages of sin; and because it is on His side only that men can endure in the hope of victory in the lifelong mortal combat which is ordained for all men, but which has only been victoriously maintained by the One Man, Jesus Christ. This is not all written down in the few words of our text, but it is taken for granted again and again in other forms, in this as in all the other demands that Jesus makes on the hearers of His preaching. They must be with Him that He may be with them, and He must be with them, and appear before God for them, that they may have God on their side.

Now this demand, that every man must decide for Him and cleave to Him, is intensified by His threatening, that otherwise they will become His enemies, and must be regarded as such by Him. "He that is not with Me is against Me." This threatening does not refer to the pronounced enemies of the Lord, to those who will not give up sin, and therefore are His adversaries, but it refers to men who listen patiently to His Word and yet do not think it worth while to decide for or against Him. They must know that indifference and indecision have already made them His enemies. The enmity which starts up against Jesus in blind anger may be transformed into love and adoration, but cold indifference to the words of salvation preached, and to the well-known Saviour, is a hopeless condition. It was because Jesus' heart was burning with love for His adversaries

and for those who had gone astray that He said to the indifferent: "I would thou wert cold or hot: so then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth."

This is also a solemn warning for us, that we too should examine our position with reference to the Person of our Saviour. A preacher cannot follow the thoughts in all their secret ways, which such words must arouse in the hearts of honest hearers. But our Lord points out a way in our text, to those who wish to examine themselves, a way in which a man may see clearly whether he is for or against Christ in his innermost heart. "He that gathereth not with Me scattereth." Jesus calls His own work gathering. He found many, in His own nation, who had gone astray, and who, in consequence of their apostasy from the law of God, had been cast out of the community, and who yet, in the desires of their hearts, were nearer the kingdom of God than many Pharisees who kept the law of God strictly. The lost sons and daughters of Israel must be sought out and gathered in. There were also true Israelites without guile, who, dissatisfied with their own righteousness and honesty, looked for a Saviour and Comforter of the nation, but they too were scattered like sheep without a shepherd; it was necessary that they should be gathered into a community of the kingdom of God. And the love of Jesus, which sought them out and gathered them in, reached still further. Jesus not only knew, but also said, that there were men outside Israel, amongst the

heathen nations, who must be gathered in from the Dispersion, so that, when united with those who had wandered and strayed from Israel, they might become one fold under the one Shepherd Jesus. The Lord did not hesitate to speak of those heathen as sheep of His fold and His already; and the Evangelist even ventured to speak of them, though they were as yet unconverted, as the dispersed children of God, for whom Jesus came and offered up His life, that they might be gathered in. This work of gathering in was not finished with the calling of the Gentiles. Even in the community which was gathered in by the Gospel, many who really could only thrive in union with it, have been separated from it and have wandered away.

We find many in the great Church communities into which Christendom has been divided, who, though outwardly united, do not inwardly belong to one another, while, outside the borders of these communities, a hand might be held out to many who are one in heart with them with reference to the great alternative whether they are for or against Christ. The day will come when all who have decided for Jesus, and have remained true to His banner, will be gathered out of the Dispersion, and will be united both outwardly and inwardly. The object of all the work of Jesus is that there may be one fold under one Shepherd. All must take part in this great work of in-gathering, if they do not wish to hear their sentence from the Lord's mouth, that they have scattered where He gathered.

Let us look at the work of our calling in the light of this judgment of Jesus. Are we gathering for the Lord, or does our work only serve to scatter what He has gathered and intends to gather in? It might seem at first sight as though he only gathered with Jesus, who, like Jesus and His apostles, preached the Gospel, so that erring and scattered souls might be gathered into the one community of the faithful, and be preserved there. But our Lord's words do not let us off so easily, for He looks upon all the men who do not work with Him as the enemies and destroyers of His work. Jesus spake thus to every one; He said the same to the women who were amongst His hearers. All cannot be, and are not meant to be, preachers of the Gospel, but every one who has placed himself by the side of Jesus will find that it is impossible to carry on the work of his calling without any reference to the work of Jesus. The words of the Apostle, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin," apply to all Christians. We must be patient with others, but severe with ourselves. In this respect also Jesus gave His disciples a helpful example. Once when they complained discontentedly of one who worked in the Name of Jesus without joining himself with the disciples, He spoke words which seem like the very opposite of our text, but which are in reality their necessary complement: "Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is on our part." We must look patiently on the works of others, even though they do not give us the impression that they have decided

for Jesus with all their hearts, and therefore so order their work that they may gather with Him. As for ourselves, we must not be content with confessing Him, and then taking up a calling which has nothing to do with Him. We need not be theologians in order to avoid this, neither need we give up any calling which is justifiable in itself and necessary for the maintenance of human society, in order to take part in the great and yet far from completed work of our Lord. Amongst the various kinds of knowledge, whose rediscovery we owe to the Reformation, one of the most fruitful is the knowledge that man can serve God in any human calling, and can work for His kingdom as menservants or maidservants, as scholars or officials, as earthly princes or priests. The kingdom of God, founded by Jesus, exists still as fellowship in faith and prayer, and as such it requires workers—many workers, indeed—whose work is solely and entirely to gather in the community, and to keep it together. But when the kingdom of God is perfected, then there will be nothing wanting in it which, in accordance with the will of God, may be the work of men's hands, and then the fruit of all their labour will be found there as a sweet reward, for all work so done is gathering with Christ. The least service that you can do in love to God and your neighbour, is done in God's service, and is a fellow-working with Jesus, which will not be lost in the kingdom of God. Even if that particular work should vanish, still the love in which it was done would remain. It remains in the

man who showed it, and in those who received it. But the most splendid work you can do, and the most fruitful investigations in any branch of learning which you can carry on, if done with no reference to the kingdom of God, and with no desire to serve Christ in His brethren, are forbidden, if you wish to be a Christian, for all comes under the Lord's verdict: "He that gathereth not with Me scattereth."

When we measure the results of our calling by this rule, we shall find that there is much which seems very unchristian, and like dead works. Let us beware of hindering the work of Christ by our actions, by not advancing it amongst His followers and in communion with Him, and then we may take fresh courage and decide for Jesus and His work. If we are really with Him and working for Him, He will also be with us and our work. Amen.

VI.

THE BEAUTY OF PRAISE.

"*And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them: and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.*"—MATT. *xxi.* 1–9.

VI.

THE BEAUTY OF PRAISE.

WE are entering Holy Week. The Friday on which Jesus died for our sins sets its mark on the whole week for all who still take part in the Divine Service of their community. Only quiet communion with self, solemn meditation on the cause of the Holy Passion, humble thanks for undeserved mercies, and some thought of the day of our own death, seem suitable for this season. On Palm Sunday we also sing hymns on the Passion. How do the loud rejoicings of which we hear the echoes in to-day's Gospel agree with this? The day, whose yearly return we are now celebrating, was, indeed, the brightest festal day in our Lord's life on earth. Without any previous arrangement or artificial preparation, so it seems, the enthusiasm and love of the people burst forth, and the Prophet of Galilee is led in triumph as King to His capital. Many-coloured garments are turned into carpets over which He rides; palms by the wayside must give up their branches to accompany Him as trophies of victory. Hill and dale resound with cries of "Hosanna"; the rejoicings seem never to come to an end; they go on even in the

Temple; the children also chime in. Ought we also to join the chorus, and can we? Surely we must not forget that the city of Jerusalem which Jesus entered had murdered the prophets, and a few days later brought Jesus to the Cross. How often we have been reminded that the Hosannas of that day were, only too soon, transformed into the cry: "Crucify Him."

If that were the whole truth, our desire to join in the cries of Hosanna on Palm Sunday would indeed soon pass away. We should only see in all this a fearful example. We should be reminded of the fickleness of popular favour, of the want of understanding on the part of the great blind multitude. We might be tempted to cry out, in warning, to the few earnest Christians who in these days feel obliged once more to praise aloud their Lord and King: "Do not make so much ado about your adoration of your Lord; for in the ground of your hearts, also, dwell wicked thoughts which may suddenly turn to deeds, and give the lie to your godly words." So, too, we should be obliged to say at last to the young Christians who first go at this season to the altar to profess their faith: "Do not make such loud and confident professions to your Lord; for how quickly the hour may come when you will deny Him in word and deed." But that would verily be a sad, yea, hurtful speech. It would also be a misunderstanding of to-day's Gospel, if we only drew such sad teaching from it. It may be that many joined in the Hosannas of that day who were only carried away by the enthusiasm of

others, but the nucleus of the multitude was formed by the disciples of Jesus, with whom were united the pilgrims to the feast who had witnessed His deeds in Galilee, and had listened to His preaching; and their intentions were honest. On the other hand, on the day of the Crucifixion, it was the high priests and their servants who first cried: "Crucify Him." If many in the crowd standing round joined in, and no voice was raised for Jesus amongst the people, we have no grounds for supposing that any one who praised Jesus on Palm Sunday demanded His death on Good Friday. If it had been so, how could Jesus have rejoiced in the triumphant shouts which accompanied His entry? When the Pharisees required Him to silence His disciples, He refused, and said: "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." It was right there should be this shouting. He took, also, the children, who probably did not think much about it at the time, under His protection in the Temple, and said to those who blamed Him: "Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?" He wished to be praised thus, He Himself planned to be thus solemnly met—for He sent for the ass, and made His entry riding on it.

And so it is still. Jesus desires, at all times and in all places, to be thus praised by His people; and especially would He be so praised at the beginning of the week which is dedicated to the remembrance of His death. Whoever calls Him Lord, and owns

himself His disciple, must cry out to Him to-day: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who cometh to us in the Name of His and of our Father, as our King and Saviour!" May God bless the Word preached to-day, that from willing, thankful, and enlightened hearts, such praise may also issue forth from our lips! I ask—

First: *How is this done?*

Secondly: *Why must it be done?*

Thirdly: *What end does it serve?*

I.

What must we do in order to honour and praise our Lord, as He rejoiced in being praised on the last Sunday of His life? How shall we show Him what reverence and love we feel for Him? We can show Him this with all the goods and gifts that we possess, if only our gift comes from the heart and redounds to His honour. This took place in many ways even in those days. One gave his ass; who knows if he ever got it back again? The others offered their outer garments, and allowed them to be trodden under foot. All raised their voices in spite of the prudent people who shook their heads. And there were other ways, too, in which He was praised. Jesus was sitting at table the night before at Bethany. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, took a box of costly ointment, anointed His feet with it, and dried them with her hair, and the house was filled

with the odour of the ointment. That was also a Hosanna. Mary did not think of the value of the ointment; nothing was too valuable for her when it was a question of honouring the Lord on whom her soul hung, and who had given her back her brother. And Martha, too, honoured Him aright while serving, and this time she was not blamed, as once before, for she left her sister, so different in nature, to take her own way. The gifts that each possessed and offered to the Lord were different; but there was *one* spirit of reverence and love in which the sacrifices of love and thankfulness were presented, which were a joy and refreshment to our Lord on His path of suffering. And verily on this spirit all depends. If in ourselves and in those around us we see but little of this spirit, the thought may come to us: "If I had seen Him, the Man mighty in word and deed, the most lovable of men, pure and sinless, incomparably great, who bore on His priestly heart His whole people, yea, all the world, and yet condescended to the lowliest disciple, meeting all with comprehending love, then my heart would have beat at the sight of Him. Most certainly I should not have been missing from amongst His followers, when it was a question of honouring Him. But now I am far from Him, and He is far from me. It is so long ago since He was upon earth, it is not surprising that hearts have grown cold towards Him." But that would not truly represent the case.

Do we then know more of the great and the little

men of our time than we do of Jesus? It is possible that we may know their outward form and dress better, the sound of their voices and the glance of their eyes. But their innermost being, the deepest thoughts and affections of their hearts, are often quite hidden from us; and if in intimate converse they let us have a glimpse into their secret thoughts, they do not always gain in esteem in our eyes, for then we find weakness and imperfection in them as in ourselves. Jesus said words, did deeds, and suffered pain which even now lay bare, to the simplest human being, His innermost thoughts and feelings, and thus we become conscious of such a harmonious life that we cannot doubt its reality. Again, that which remained unexpressed and concealed in Him was of the same nature as that which He revealed. All, too, that has not been delivered to us of what He said and did cannot have been different from what we have seen and heard of Him. All that we have seen of Jesus and have heard of Him, makes us believe in Him—the greatest One who has ever been seen in the world. A clean heart which sees God at all times, an unconquered will which has overcome all evil in the world, and, in addition, a love for the impure and weak of will which will not cease when life ends. To Him the palm is due. Whenever His form rises, as though living before our eyes, it is but natural that we should greet Him with the enthusiasm of His disciples and His people on the first Palm Sunday. But we must not allow the

thought to keep us back, that our acquaintance with Jesus is too superficial, our knowledge of His Being far too imperfect, or that besides all that, we imagine we know of Him and which draws our hearts to Him, there is much in His words and deeds that is incomprehensible to us, and therefore repelling rather than alluring. The people who greeted the Lord so joyously on Palm Sunday had no very clear and perfect knowledge of His Person and of His work. They would have fared badly, if, like our Confirmation candidates at this season, they had been examined in their profession of faith, and yet Jesus rejoiced in their Hosannas.

Whole centuries passed by during which the Gospel light in all Christendom was like a dim expiring lamp, and therefore the form of Jesus for most people was so obscured that it was almost unrecognisable; and yet Hosannas were not silenced, but much that was grand and beautiful was wrought to the glory of the Lord Jesus in music, in sculpture, and in brilliant colouring. When a school-child, in Roman Catholic countries, greets you on the way with the old greeting, "Praised be Jesus," the thought may well arise, "What, poor child, dost thou know of Jesus?" And yet I have often felt ashamed when I have heard it, and I did not remember at once the answer that the child expected: "For ever. Amen." There may have been much ignorance and also trust in works of righteousness in all that our fathers did to the glory of the Saviour in the Middle Ages, and yet

it bears witness to the kingly power of Jesus over the godly hearts of men. The glorious cathedrals which they built, the costly garments and carpets which they wove and embroidered, the pictures they painted, the statues they carved, the songs and melodies some of which are still sung in our Evangelical Churches—all are Palm Sunday works with which the Lord is well pleased. Let any one who cannot do anything of the same kind help others to whom God has given special gifts, or let him sing the hymns which have been sung before us by others; but he must do it from the heart and only to the glory of Jesus Christ. Even if one should be born deaf, dumb, and blind, yet he could still follow the Apostle's injunction: "Sing in your hearts to the Lord." During these days let every one say in the quiet of his own heart: "Oh! great King, great at all times, how can I make known Thy faithfulness aright!"

II.

Is the answer to the question, "*Why must this be done?*" still needed? If on that day any one had asked the people who hailed the Lord, why they shouted so loudly, they would have looked at the questioners in amazement. I have already referred to the answer which the Lord Himself gave for His friends: "If men were as senseless and dumb as stones, God could create men out of stones, who would have hearts for the Son of Man, and mouths

to speak His praise." And when the disciples did not know what to think of Mary of Bethany's extravagant deed of love, when Judas asked: "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?" the Lord Himself gave the answer again: "Why trouble ye the woman? She hath wrought a good work on Me. Ye have the poor always with you—but Me ye have not always." And all others who since then have acted thus or in some similar way, when asked why they did it, have only been able to answer: "That which filled our hearts needed an outlet; and if we succeeded in making something beautiful to the glory of God, it was our greatest joy that God's good pleasure rested on our work, though so poor and weak in comparison with His majesty."

There is a time for everything in the life of man, and every day is not Palm Sunday. But wherever love and thankfulness exist, where Jesus is understood and adored, festival-days and moments of uplifting will come, in which, if only the Lord be praised, all other feelings fall into the background. Then ways and means to praise Him by word and deed will be found. We are not always enraptured and inspired, but we ought to remind ourselves that we all have good reasons for desiring such hours of rapture, because our inner and also our outer life would soon become poverty-stricken and barren, if our daily round were not now and then interrupted by a Hosanna from our

very hearts. It is, as is said in the old prayer, used at the Lord's Supper, "very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should give thanks at all times and in all places." Yea, it is not only meet and right, but also for our own good, if we often thus allow ourselves to be filled and uplifted with holy joy in the Lord. It is good for us just now, during the quiet week between Palm Sunday and Easter Day. If we can only gaze with deep abasement of heart, and with consciences painfully stirred, on

> "That bleeding Head so wounded,
> Reviled and put to scorn,"

then we must also think of the palms which foretold His victory, so that we may also be able to say beneath the Cross: "He is indeed a King, though, verily, a King unlike all others."

Rulers who must break down all opposition to their rule by outward force, meet with little love from their subjects, and rejoicings over bloody victories very soon die away. Palm Sunday rejoicings are renewed every year in the community which acknowledges Jesus as its Lord and King, because He has verily fulfilled the words of the Prophet: "Say unto the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, ready to suffer and to die, and yet certain to conquer and to live." Whoever compares the words of the dying Saviour on the Cross, with the mocking words of His enemies beneath the Cross, and asks himself which gained

the victory then, must without any hesitation give the palm to the dying Jesus. Only very great faith was able thus to judge on the day of His death; to-day only the purest folly can judge otherwise. It was not the wickedness of His enemies that gained the victory over Jesus; it was He who overcame evil. Even though He was defenceless when He suffered, He was nevertheless a King to whom the righteous and holy God must, at last, give all power in heaven and earth. Every one who has in his own inner life realised and experienced something of the invincible power of goodness which has come to us men through our Lord Jesus, who for our sakes humbled Himself even unto death, will be unable to hold his peace, he must hail Him as the King of His community. We do so because we cannot help it, and we will not leave off, because it is for our own good. Love becomes young again, faith grows, and hope waxes strong, when they proclaim and set themselves forth in all kinds of actions that are well pleasing to God and man.

III.

Thus we have already *one* answer to our last question: "What end does it serve if we glorify God in all our words and works?" What has already been said might indeed suffice for those cold, prudent people who always ask, "What is the use?" But there is yet another answer to be

found in our Gospel. When our Lord Himself sent word to the owner of the ass, "The Lord hath need of him," this it was that above all else glorified that day of the entry into Jerusalem; and this applies also to all that we can do and provide, in order that we may honour Him as our King. The Lord needs all, though not indeed for Himself. He who was ready to bear a painful and ignominious death, could well have renounced all claim to that brilliant entry and the fleeting joy of that hour, if He had thought only of self. And now that the angels round His and His Father's throne, praise in heavenly tones the Lamb that was slain, surely He cannot need our human hymns of praise and our feast-days for Himself? But now, as then, He needs them all, in order that He may come to His people. He needs them, that to every one of His people, to those, too, who know Him not, may be said loudly and clearly: "Behold your King." His people, in those days, were the daughter of Zion, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the whole Jewish people, who out of all parts of the Holy Land crowded to the feast. To-day the people of Christ are the Christians in all lands. There are many amongst the people of the Lord who misunderstand Him, and, did it rest with them, He would have been forgotten long ago. But Jesus does not forget those who have received His name. He causes it to be proclaimed in many ways, even to those who seem to have forgotten their Christian

names: "Behold, your King cometh unto you." But in order that this may be done, the Lord needs those who know and honour Him. It is indeed right and Christian to practise humility, and not to think much of what we ourselves can do, but it is not right to think little of what we ought to do, and which, with God's help, we may do. The Lord needs our joyful songs of praise and all the visible proofs of the reverence and love for Him of which we are capable, that He may find an entrance to the hearts of those who are only Christian in name, who do not yet know Him, or know Him no longer. If our Lord declared that the shouts of the children in the Temple had power to overcome His enemies, of how much greater value must be the Hosannas of men and women. All can do something to open a way for the Lord to the hearts of His people that have been estranged from Him. Preaching and teaching are necessary, and when rightly done, they are useful too, but they are not the business of every man, and they do not reach many who yet might be won. I know men who have been so injudiciously instructed in Christianity in their youth, that they make their experience, with a certain amount of justice, their excuse for turning their backs on the Gospel and the Church. Preaching and teaching are not the only ways of winning subjects for Jesus, the King. To-day's Gospel shows us another way which all the

disciples of Jesus can tread, the young as well as the old, women as well as men. We must all praise God in our daily lives, and in all that is lovely and of good repute. If we wish to serve Him in that in which He needs our service, if we wish to help Him in again finding an entrance to His people and our people, then we dare not look surly and gloomy before other men, but must carry all our cares and wants to the closet where we pray, and pour them out before our Heavenly Father, and we must walk before men with our heads raised and with joyful faces. We must let men see that He whom we serve is a great King, and that there is no higher honour or greater joy than serving and honouring Him with heart and lips, with soul and body.

My beloved, I say once again, every day is not Palm Sunday, but let the joyful tones which this day puts into our mouths, echo quietly in our hearts through the days to come. May they thus echo through all our doings till the day on which, with palm branches in our hands, we shall again greet the King with the words: "Hosanna to the Son of God!" Amen.

VII.

THREE WORDS FROM THE CROSS.

"*Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar; and they filled a spunge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*"—JOHN *xix.* 25–30.

VII.

THREE WORDS FROM THE CROSS.

WE are now standing beneath the Cross on which Jesus is dying. The Good Friday bells have called us hither; the Word of God must keep us all here. How many there are who gather with us in spirit round the Cross on this day and at this hour! Many come to church on Good Friday who never come at any other time! All that was preached to us last Sunday is made plain to each one to-day. He, who made Himself of no reputation, and humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even unto the death of the Cross, has been highly exalted by God, who hath also given Him a name which is above every name. There is no other day in the whole of the Church's year when so many bend the knee to Jesus Christ, as the day kept in memory of His deepest humiliation, His most painful death, and all gaze, devoutly at least and full of awe, on that

> "Bleeding Head so wounded,
> Reviled and put to scorn."

But it is just because there are so many and such very different types of men who gather round the

Cross on Good Friday, that the question must be asked: What have you come hither to see or to hear? Surely you have not come merely to hear an address which some one may deliver on the death of the Lord? That would not be right, my friends. Any voice of man, endeavouring to assert itself in the Church of God, has no right here; and, verily, every address that man can give is only foolish, idle talk, if it aspires to be anything more than a sign-post, to point all eyes to the form of the crucified Saviour.

But what do ye see there? A man suffering inhuman tortures, and wrestling for hours with death in the greatest agony. Truly, it is an awful sight that we gaze upon in Golgotha; the more vividly we picture it to ourselves the more it tortures us, and it does not become any more helpful to us when it brings to our remembrance all the unspeakable torments which, both before and after, have been suffered by other men at the hand of man. The effect of such an awful spectacle is a feeling of stupefaction at our own helplessness in the presence of such an awful mystery in the Divine government of the world. It does not help us either to remember that He who bore all this agony was perfectly innocent, yea, that it was the only Holy One whose sufferings were enhanced by coarse blasphemy. This thought may move us to tender pity, as it did the women of Jerusalem, who had already wept over Jesus on the way to the Cross. Possibly, too, we

may have a suspicion that the sin, which brought Jesus to the Cross, may have its likeness in our hearts, as in those of the crowds who smote their breasts as they returned from the place where Jesus had been put to death. The silent figure of the Saviour does not lead us on to a festival, the uplifting of our souls, or the giving of any explanation. But He who hangs upon the Cross is not silent. He opens His mouth seven times in articulate speech, and, God be thanked, men were there who heard those words, and preserved them for us. The words of the dying Jesus are words of eternal life. They lay bare for us the heart of Him who died, and raise us up above our own thoughts and feelings. It is true that those who were determined to be the enemies of Jesus did not understand His words, neither will such men ever understand them. When He cried, "Eli, Eli, My God, My God," they imagined He called for Elias, and mocked Him. But the malefactor on the cross beside Him understood His words, and drew comfort from them when in the pangs of death. Even the heathen centurion felt that the words of Jesus transfigured the sufferings of this good and righteous man. How differently these words must have gone home to the hearts of the faithful few who had ventured to stay beneath the Cross! They accepted them as a costly legacy, and delivered them unto us, that we too may acknowledge what took place for us upon the Cross. It is true these words reveal to us human consciousness of pain, human moaning, questioning

and supplication; but when we listen more closely, they make known, through all this human suffering, Divine strength of will, a deed of Divine might. Let us meditate on the dying hour of the Lord Jesus, in the light of the three Words from the Cross, which John, the Evangelist, the only Apostle who remained for a time beneath the Cross, has preserved for us in our text for to-day. These three Words have a threefold lesson—

First: *Jesus died in tender love for His own.*

Secondly: *He died in the liberty and power of the Son of God.*

Thirdly: *By dying He completed the work of His life.*

I.

The first Word, which we hear to-day from the lips of the dying Saviour, was spoken to His mother, Mary. It was not the first that Jesus had spoken from the Cross. John the Evangelist passes quickly over the first hours of the suffering on the Cross, as the other Evangelists had already described them sufficiently. At mid-day darkness spreads over Golgotha, and all is still beneath the Cross. The chief enemies have satisfied their lust for revenge; the crowd of the curious melts away, so that His kinsfolk, who till now had stood afar off, can draw near—the mother of Jesus, with her sister and two other women, and John, the disciple whom Jesus had drawn most closely to Himself. They

come close under the Cross, and, by their love, these faithful ones gain strength to look up into the face of the suffering Lord. Then the sword, of which Mary had already been told, pierces her heart. She sees the son she had borne in the agonies of death, and what a son! Though the Evangelists tell us so little of the relation between Mary and Jesus, yet this much is certain, that He had been more than a son to her from the beginning. The light of her life is about to be extinguished. She is dumb in her sorrow; she has nothing to say or to give to her son. But when He who is dying looks at His mother, and at the friend who stands near her, He says to her: "Woman, behold thy son!" and to the disciple He says: "Behold thy mother!" This is human faithfulness and love even unto death, the tenderest fulfilment of a son's duty to his mother. Mary had other sons, the brethren of the Lord, who are not infrequently mentioned in the Gospels with their mother. They had grown up under the same roof with Jesus, and later, when the Lord had entered on His public life, they formed a household with their mother. We might think that, even after the death of her first-born, Mary would not have been left desolate. But the brethren of Jesus did not stand beneath the Cross. Not many months before, they had opposed the Lord, who was their brother, doubting, criticising, and almost scoffing. In her sorrow for the dying Jesus, Mary was forsaken by her other sons. How lonely she would have felt

in her own house during the long period of mourning for Him who was dead! She would not have starved, they would have given her daily bread, but the want of her soul, the void which had been made by the death of Jesus, could not have been filled by any of her own family. Only a brother of Jesus in heart and mind could be a support to her; only one who had lived through the awful hour of His death with her, could give her comfort during the years that she no longer had Jesus. Such an one was not wanting. The disciple John, the only man who with His mother had ventured beneath the Cross, and had faithfully endured there in love and sorrow, deserved to be called a brother of Jesus and a son of Mary; he was to be the protector and guardian of the mother in her declining years.

But how does all this concern us? It is certainly affecting to see how the Lord, in the midst of the agonies of death, thinks of His duty as a son, and fulfils a son's duty in the tenderest way. This also may be for us "a mirror of innocence, and a seal of love and truest faithfulness." The thought might suggest itself: Blessed was the mother who had such a son! yea, blessed was the woman for whom the Saviour of the world cared so faithfully in His dying hour. This is all true, and yet it is not the whole truth of this Word from the Cross. You remember what Jesus Himself said, when a woman in the midst of the crowd called the mother blessed who had given birth to, and had nourished, this

son. Then said Jesus: "Yea, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." We are now hearing the Word of God. Blessed are we, if we hear it aright and keep it. The Word of the dying Lord Jesus to His mother is verily a Word of God to us. For if we hear it aright, the words that express the love and faithfulness of a son to His earthly mother, reveal also Divine love and care for all, who, like Mary, cling to the Cross and the Crucified. Jesus said: "Woman, behold thy son."

Is that the way, then, that such a loving son should speak to His mother in deep affliction? Once before Jesus had already spoken thus to Mary, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, when Mary thought that, as a mother, she might remind her son of His duty and urge Him on to action. Then Jesus checked His mother with the words: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" The words of the Son, in the hour of painful parting, do not sound so harsh and severe as at the joyful feast. Still our Lord does not say, "My poor dear mother," but He speaks to her as He would to any of the other women standing beneath the Cross. The natural bond, which links mother to son, gives no preference to this blessed woman when the office of Jesus is in question. There she stands as one only of Eve's many daughters, and Jesus is the Son of God, whose work and suffering concern all the children of Adam. Even now, while Jesus is

hanging on the Cross, He is carrying on the work of His calling: He is even now preparing to carry out His last and greatest work when dying. His mother is to Him but one of the many human souls for whom He was giving His life as a ransom. She was a woman, and ought to know it. He was not dying as the dearly-loved son of His mother; but He was dying for her and for all who cling to Him as the only-begotten Son of God. Till His last breath, Jesus fulfilled His duty as a son, as He fulfilled all His other duties; but by fulfilling them He released Himself from them all. While setting His earthly home in order, and giving His mother another son in His stead, He is already soaring up in spirit to the Home of His Heavenly Father, and pointing the way thither to His mother, His disciples, and all His future disciples, both men and women, who hear His Word. Whilst He was living in the flesh, He was near to one and far from another, as the son of His mother, the brother of His brethren, the especial friend of John the Evangelist, and a member of the Jewish people. All others were far from Him; His word, His love and His care could not reach them. Now that He is exalted, He can and will draw them all unto Himself. You must not imagine that Mary lost anything thereby, or that it pained her to be called a woman by her dying son. Neither, on the other hand, must you envy her, as though we could lay no claim to the riches

of the protecting love which was vouchsafed to the mother of the Lord in these words. Jesus is the same yesterday and to-day. He who on the Cross thought so tenderly of the special need of the one woman who was His mother, is the same who, having broken through the limitations of His earthly life, passed through death and hell to heavenly glory. He is not poorer in love to each individual soul, but richer in power to enable all to feel it.

II.

But we are now still standing beneath the Cross, and watching the Lord's suffering. Burning thirst is added to the pain of His wounds and the dislocation of His limbs. Jesus does not hide His agony from man. He says: "I thirst." This complaint is a request to His executioners, and His request touches a compassionate heart. One of the soldiers fills a sponge with vinegar, and reaches it up to His mouth on a reed, and moistens His parched lips. Mocking words are heard again, as we learn from the other Evangelists; but still it was the fulfilment of the earnest request of Him who was dying, and it was a work of mercy to give Him the vinegar. It was but a poor beverage: the Lord on the Cross was not so well cared for as our dying ones, to whom we give the choicest that earth can provide. Still, it was the refreshment that He required. But why did He require it?

Had the agony at last become too much for Him? Had He also said, as one of us in our weakness and impatience might say: "I cannot endure it any more, I cannot bear it any longer"? So judged the heathenish enemies of Christianity sixteen hundred years ago[1] of the words, "I thirst." But the Evangelist John, who was standing beneath the Cross, and who has preserved this Word for us, knew and understood better. It was not in impatience, nor in failure of obedience in suffering that Jesus complained of thirst, but in the full consciousness that thus He was doing His Father's will. For what do we read? "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith: I thirst." He bore all the suffering that man could lay upon Him; He emptied the cup of sorrow to the very dregs; He experienced what it meant to be no longer conscious of the help and nearness of God, and thus, forsaken of God, He also experienced how wide the rent was, and how deep the chasm, which separated the Holy and Living God from sinful and dying men. All this He must have felt the more deeply, because the purer His soul the more unnatural it was for Him to be bereft of the helpful nearness of His God and Father and of His efficacious grace. But in this conflict, so full of suffering, though He had felt all the pains of body and soul, as only man

[1] The reference is to the opinion of the Neo-Platonist Porphyrius, fl. 260–300 A.D.

can feel them, He had gained the victory, He had not murmured or doubted, and when He saw and felt only the very opposite of the love of God, His faith had not wavered. God had remained His Father and His God through all His pain and suffering. Then an inner voice said to Him: "The suffering has been completed."

Only one more thing remained that must be done, that the will of God, as He had read in the Holy Scriptures, might be fulfilled; in all the previous suffering there was still one more thing which had not yet been done. It was written in the Scriptures that the suffering Servant of God would give His life as a sacrifice for sin.

Long before Jesus had made the will of God His own, and had said that He had come to give His life as a ransom for many. In ministering love to His brethren, and in free obedience to the will of God, He must and He will lay down His life. Now this must be done, now this holy offering must be made. That He might be able to offer it as was fitting, and as He intended, He said: "I thirst." Therefore He asks and receives the reviving draught. He will not pass over to another life, fainting and unconscious, but, in full possession of His senses and with His mind quite clear, He will lay down His life as a sacrifice. What kind of a sacrifice would that be which was not offered with a free will and a clear mind? What would be the worth of the gift of the most holy life, if it was not really

laid down, but wrested from the helpless by external force? The unique greatness of this deed, the reconciliation of the world by this sacrifice, consisted in the fact that it was a deed of free will, a deed of love for lost mankind, of obedience to the Heavenly Father. No other man has ever so died; but the Son of God could not have died otherwise. Before His suffering, even He Himself said: "No man taketh My life from me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Jesus proved the truth of these words when, revived by the draught of vinegar, He cried with a loud voice, and commended His spirit into the hands of His Father.

Such a sacrifice has only once been offered. How little do we men in general understand how to offer sacrifices! We desire, by nature, to have and to enjoy, to live and to assert ourselves in the battle of life. It is education which first teaches us that we must, now and then, forego what is pleasant to us. Man has a calling, and his duty bids him do what is not pleasant. To duty is added love, which awakens the heart of man, under many forms; it not only commands but also teaches us to offer up our own well-being for the good of others. But when we subtract everything which, even in the best of lives, only looks like a sacrifice of renunciation, while really it is an act of self-love or ambition, or the forced result of necessity, there is not very much left over. We all love life; we tremble for

our lives when they are in danger; with our last breath we cling to life, this sinful, mortal life, as if it were our greatest good. And if a man volunteers as a soldier, and then goes to certain death, when sometimes the death of one may be the salvation of many, yet still he does not give up his life, but allows it to be taken from him. Jesus, only, gave up His life freely, in love for the brethren who were not worthy of that love, and in obedience to the will of God. Thereby He made an offering that was well pleasing to God. Thereby He atoned for all the disobedience and self-seeking of mankind.

III.

Jesus finished His life's work by the act of His holy death. But before He bowed His head and died, He said: "It is finished." Even before He called for the reviving draught He knew that all was now finished. But men were to hear from His own mouth that it was in this certainty that He died. These words became true in their fullest sense when the sacrifice of His holy life ascended up to heaven. His mouth was then closed, but the Word which He had spoken immediately before, resounds in heaven and on earth. The spirits before the throne of God in heaven, and the community of the faithful on earth say: "The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive glory and honour and power." In fact, there is nothing better for us to do than

to join with them, and say: "Blessed is He who has completed that which none of us could do, who for us has entered the breach, and in the power of His eternal Spirit has laid down His life, in order to take it again, and to give to us poor creatures the life once laid down and taken up again."

My beloved, I know well that there is much that will be questioned, thought of, and argued, before even one hundred men can praise the crucified Saviour for His completed work in the same sense and with the same meaning. But the chief question for us is simply: Either the Word of the dying Lord Jesus, "It is finished," is true, and true also are the echoes of this Word by the angels in heaven, and in the songs of His community on earth; or they are untrue, and we must all die in our sins without hope and without exception. We do much to please ourselves; we do something, perhaps, that is useful to other men, and that gives them joy, but we finish nothing; we never come to the end of anything that is either good or bad. If we flatter ourselves today, that we have succeeded in something or other, which is perfect of its kind, perhaps years hence we may ourselves smile over our work and our self-deception. And it is only with reference to isolated words and deeds that a sensible man can indulge in such thoughts. All that is most successful is but piece-work, a fragment of the whole which none can accomplish or hope to see. Not one of us will be able to say on his death-bed: "I have finished

all that was given me to do on earth. I am ready to go with the fruit of my life, and the work of my life, to the other world, where men do not praise and blame, flatter and deceive, but where God judges." But why is the work of our life only piece-work? Because we want to be something in ourselves, and cannot get rid of self-seeking in our own strength; because we cannot make up our minds to give ourselves wholly to God, and lovingly and freely to offer our lives to God and our brethren, only to receive them back again, all the richer. We finish nothing because we are born the servants of sin. We may even realise this partially without faith in the crucified Saviour; but it is impossible to ignore it, when we gaze with honest hearts on the dying Jesus. There we see and also hear from His own mouth what is wanting in us—a human life which lacks nothing for its completion. That mouth from which none ever heard a lie, or a word of vain pride, said, "It is finished": that is in itself already a pledge for us of the truth of this His Word. All had been accomplished for which He knew that He was born, in so far as it could and must be accomplished during His walk on earth. When dying He looked upon the work of His life, and also upon His suffering, and was satisfied. But what was the meaning of that to Him? Jesus did not come to be ministered unto and to be wondered at, or to show us, who bring nothing to perfection, an example that should put us to shame, of how

much that was perfect and great could be accomplished in a short life. He came in self-denying love to serve mankind, to seek the lost, to bring back the wanderers to the way of God, to appear for them as their Intercessor, and, lastly, to offer up for all the most powerful of all prayers, namely, His death, that He might offer to the Father in heaven the holy sacrifice of His life.

According to the will of Him who offered it, this most perfect sacrifice, of which all other sacrifices ever brought by men to propitiate God are but shadowy types and images, is only available for those who accept its efficacy. It is effectual and powerful for all who do not simply stand in imagination beneath the Cross, but who find room in their hearts for that grace of God to which the dying Jesus bore witness by word and deed. If we take our stand in earnest beneath the Cross, we then feel, before all things, that we are very far from being of the same mind as Jesus Christ, and that there is much in our inner and outer lives which affects us powerfully, and which is not willing to bend beneath His finished work. But for this, too, there is help at hand, for Jesus did not complete His priestly ministry on the Cross, in order that He might no longer be the Priest of any who at any time need a priest. But He reigns in heaven as a merciful Priest for all those who need His mediation, with the same sympathising and interceding love which was revealed

to us on the Cross. Because He is in heaven He is equally near to all. If we cling to His Word, we are no farther off from Him than His mother was, and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Has he not Himself said: "My mother and my brethren are those which hear the word of God and do it"? And though we have nothing more to bring to Him than the consciousness of our own need, and trust in the truth of His last Words, we may yet call on Him and pray to Him: Thou who hast finished the work of Thy life, have mercy on us, who can finish nothing. Complete in us Thy work of atonement and give us Thy peace. Amen.

VIII.

THE PROMISE OF SUCCESS.

"*After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.*"—JOHN *xxi.* 1–14.

VIII.

THE PROMISE OF SUCCESS.

EASTER lies behind us. Last Sunday, the day on which so many young Christians in our town strengthened their bond with the crucified and risen Saviour by the confession of their faith, and by receiving His Sacrament, was a fitting conclusion to the succession of great memorial days. Has the old everyday life begun again for us all now, the old as well as the young? In the early days of the Church, when Christians, more than they do now, allowed their outer life to be ordered by the faith and Divine worship of the community, the whole of the time between Easter and Whitsuntide was looked upon as a joyful time, a perpetual Sunday. As on every Sunday, the commemoration day of the Resurrection of Christ, no sign of holy sorrow and abasement of heart was allowed, and no fasting or bending of the knee in prayer, because of the joy in the victory of the Saviour, so it was also during these weeks after Easter. Men wished to retain a little while longer the Easter joy which will last for ever, and which even before it is wholly fulfilled will transfigure all the sorrows

of time. It is true that weeks are no more an eternity than a single day. But for us men, who pass our lives in the unceasing change of days that will never return, a day, from morning till evening, is a picture of transitoriness, while a longer succession of days, on which every morning the same frame of mind and train of thought are renewed with the early dawn of day, is a picture of stability in change, of eternity in fleeting time. Oh that we cherished Easter joy in our hearts as enduring and eternal, and experienced it in our lives! The text for to-day will do its part in helping us: it tells an Easter story. And there is a second reason which makes it especially suitable for us to-day.

Festivals are followed by work for every one. This is especially true of us who are connected with the University, and whose preacher, on account of illness, I have to represent again to-day. After some weeks of recreation and quiet self-chosen work, public professional work will begin again in a few days. Teachers are making their preparations, and hearers are assembling. Shall we make a new beginning in the work of our calling under the hard law of ancient days: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee. . . . In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground, for out of it wast thou taken"? Or shall we take up the work of our calling again in the joyful light of

the glorious day on which the second Adam rose from the heart of the earth? The question for us is, whether we intend to labour like Adam, and those who are only the children of Adam, under the pressure of guilt unatoned, looking back, perchance, longingly to Paradise lost, and looking forward sorrowfully to the grave which must one day receive us and all our labour; or whether we intend to link it on to the great work of Jesus Christ, and then to labour, trusting in the victory which He has won, in the hope that our work in and with His work may also attain the longed-for goal? These two kinds of work are separated as widely as heaven and earth from each other; but both are near to us. We are all the children of Adam, and we are also all Christians. But here in this house Christ calls us to Himself; the Risen Lord calls us in the words of to-day's text to take up new work. To us, too, He says: "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find."

This was no new speech to the seven disciples by the Lake of Gennesaret. More than a year before, many of them, in the same place, had once spent a whole night at their trade as fishermen, without catching anything, and then, at the Master's word, had launched out into the deep and had enclosed a great multitude of fishes. And this experience in their lower calling had been used by Jesus Himself as a picture of their future labours in their higher apostolic calling. Now that He is

risen, this symbolical action is repeated. The Lord thus appointed the apostles anew to their office, and gave them directions for the work of their calling. It was not only by this draught of fishes, but also by many other actions and many other words, that this was done by the Lord during those days; but, surely, never so suggestively, so consolingly, and so encouragingly for all future time.

It was an occasion when but few words were exchanged. But when an act speaks so intelligibly, many words are not needed. A mysterious twilight suffused the whole scene, but it was daybreak. We, too, pass our lives in twilight, in the twilight between the darkness of this life which by many is accounted the only true day, and the bright day of eternity. Jesus, the Risen One, comes to meet us, too, in the twilight, and gives us directions and promises for the work of our calling. Let us therefore listen to Him during this hour, and consider with one another the *calling of those who acknowledge the Risen Jesus as their Lord.* There is, however, a double lesson for us in our text.

First: *According to their Lord's command and advice, His disciples always take up their work again.*

Secondly: *The Risen Lord guarantees the success of their work.*

I.

On Easter Day the band of the disciples, in and around Jerusalem, had been led onward from

despair to new faith. Then they returned to Galilee, whither the Lord had already directed them before His death, and again after His Resurrection. We think of them on their return home as reassured in the depths of their hearts, full of quiet joy, but also full of expectation of all that was yet to come. Where Jesus had first called them to His service and to participation in His work, there they were to see Him again, in order to be reinstated in their calling. For this they waited in patience. When they arrived at their home by the Lake of Gennesaret, not seeing the Lord at once, whose unrivalled words and deeds must have been brought back to their memory at every step, they did not waste their strength in agitating reminiscences of the late overwhelming events, and in impatient expectation of new wonders, but they got into their fishing-boats to earn their daily bread. Their hands had not forgotten how to handle rudder, sail, and net, and the great thoughts which swelled their breasts did not make them too grand and too proud for their former employment. And because of their humility and tranquillity these men were worthy to be called again of God to higher work, to be again made fishers of men by Jesus, that they might carry on their work in larger measure and with much greater results than He Himself had done; no longer now on the shores of the little lake, but on the sea-coasts which unite and separate man-

kind, and far away, over land and sea, to the very ends of the earth. The hour arrived for their re-appointment unexpected and unnoticed. They were intending to land again, after a long and fruitless sail, when a man hails them from the shore, and asks them if they have nothing to eat. He remains unknown to them. It is only that they may leave nothing untried, that they follow his advice, and cast out the net once more on the other side of the boat. It is the speedy and great result which first causes them to recognise the Man whose word they had so often seen followed by great blessings. John first says, "It is the Lord," and Peter cannot wait till the boat, heavily laden with the net, reaches the shore, but casts himself into the sea to meet the Lord. Now no long minute explanation of what had happened was necessary. The Lord, who once, in the same place, had made them helpers in His work, now gives them commands and advice, in the symbolism of their own unconscious actions, as to the way in which they are to take up their work anew, and again and again to take it up even when their work seemed of no avail, and any prospect of results absolutely incredible.

How often in after years the apostles must have remembered this wonderful take of fishes, as they did the earlier one! How often this experience must have inspired and consoled them, when they preached to deaf ears and hard hearts,

or when they were put into chains, and it seemed as though the word of truth had been bound thereby, or when human weakness and perversity appeared amongst themselves and proved a hindrance to success. Then they could say to themselves: "It is the Lord's command. It is His work which He has commanded us to do. We are weak, but He knew that beforehand. He knows to what weak hands and wavering hearts He has entrusted the most difficult and highest calling — to make the nations of the earth His disciples and citizens of His kingdom. To us who could not watch with Him in the hour of His fiercest conflict, to us who fled like cowards, yea, even denied Him when He fell into the hands of His enemies, He has, nevertheless, given the command anew, "Cast out the net." Thus the apostles were spurred on and given no rest and repose in the work of their calling. And this is the meaning of the words at the present day for all who acknowledge the Risen Jesus as their Lord.

Can there be any one here who has a calling in the exercise of which he cannot say at all times, it is the Lord's command? We may be tempted to imagine that our Lord only created one new calling, that He only founded one new office, namely, the office of preaching the Gospel, the calling of the apostles. In that case, only we who are theologians, clergymen, missionaries, and religious teachers could feel assured that Christ had given us our work to

do, but not the judges and doctors, merchants and artisans, artists and scholars, women and children. Jesus was not the first to call all these professions and vocations into being, and He Himself came into contact with but few of them. For instance, He refused to have anything to do with the office of Judge. Once when Jesus was besought by one, who disputed with his brother about his inheritance, to settle the dispute between them, Jesus answered: "Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?" But then He said, in accordance with His office: "Beware of covetousness." It seems, too, that Jesus gave little heed to politics. When He was asked whether it was right to pay tribute to the foreign pagan emperor, He took no part in the strife of opinions, but in accordance with His office probed the consciences of the questioners, by asking them what they owed to the emperor whose protection they enjoyed, and what they owed to God who had called them to eternal life. Jesus, it is true, healed many sick people, but still the calling of a physician was not His, but only a representation of His, and He told none to learn the art of healing. He may have used the saw and plane in the house of His parents, but He gave up this trade when He openly appeared in order to become the Teacher and Saviour of His people and of all humanity. From that time He confined Himself to that which He acknowledged as His vocation: the founding of the kingdom of God

in the hearts of sinful men by the witness of the truth. The calling of the apostles was just as sharply defined. And yet all Christians are not apostles. Only a very few have a calling which can be represented as a continuation of the calling of the apostles. But it would be a sad and dangerous error for a Christian to imagine that the work of his calling had nothing to do with the Lord Christ, with His command, and with faith in Him; for it does not answer to be a Christian here in church on Sunday, and to be a heathen in every-day work. Our Lord is Christ only when He is also the Lord and Master of the work of our calling.

How long have men spoken in the world of a vocation that every one must have? How long has a man who has no calling, or who carries on his work without any vocation for it, been looked upon as an unhappy or despicable man? The heathen of antiquity, the Greeks and Romans, of pre-Christian times, did not even know the word "vocation," as we are accustomed to use it, and they had no idea of the fulness of the blessing and duty which is contained in the thought of having a vocation which we must carry out. Vocation has only been talked of since Jesus came into this world, and called to the fishermen on the lake, and the publican in the tolling-booth, and the rich youth who did not know what to do with his life and his riches: "Follow Me, and I will give you work."

In every vocation capabilities and gifts are required that none can give to himself. We often call them "talents." But whence comes this word? From nowhere else than the parable of Jesus of the pounds or talents, which the great householder of the world entrusted to his servants, that they might trade with them. Since then we have known that it is wrong and does harm to bury our talents, to leave our gifts unused, to neglect our vocation. All gifts, all tasks come from God, the Almighty Creator and loving Father, and all vocations and offices proceed from Him, and the ordinances and various gradations in life in which men as kings must subject the world to themselves, in order that as priests they may offer again to God all the riches of God-created life. But it was the Son of God who opened again the eyes of us blind men, and pointed out the way to wanderers, and the object of all work that is worthy of man. The kingdom of God shall come; God shall be King; the God who is hidden, forsaken, and ridiculed, shall reign over a noble generation of men, to whom He has restored their lost liberty, and by them over a world that overflows with His blessing and is full of His glory. The will of God shall reign, not only in hearts but in heads, and not only in spirit but in man's outer life, yea, in all that God has created and that has been estranged from Him by sin. And all who have been created by God in His own image, are called to work with

Him that the kingdom of God may come. The foundation of this work was laid by Jesus Christ Himself. He has done the greater part, for, by living and dying, He has atoned for the sin of the world which separates us from the love of the Heavenly Father, and which also makes all work on earth slavery and a useless struggle. The greatest and most precious thing in our own lives is, and will remain for all time, the peace that we have with God, through our Saviour, that as redeemed and justified we may be certain of the Fatherly love of God in evil as well as in good days.

But the same Lord who has obtained for us such a blessed position, as the children of God, calls us also to work, each one to the work of his own calling. One office, as we have already said, He created anew, the office of preaching reconciliation and righteousness; but He did not therefore account any other calling insignificant, or to be abrogated. Jesus did not come to destroy, but to fulfil. There has never been any lack of forms of work that are well pleasing to God, but Jesus came to give them a living substance. It was the object of His life to accomplish the whole will of His Heavenly Father. Therefore He did not make preachers of all believers, nor fishers of men of all fishermen, while of all the publicans who clave to Him only one was made an apostle. But all who wish to be called His disciples must seek the kingdom of God, and that not only in

faith, in prayer, and in the sanctification of their own lives, but also in the work of their calling. There is no kind of honest work which may not serve to the advancement of the kingdom of God. A Christian must give up all work of which this cannot be said, but all work that a Christian may do because it *may* further the coming of the kingdom of God, *must* also further it, and then it will be holy and good whether it be considered high or low by man. For what then is really great and eternal in the work of man, but the love, truth, and humility in which it is done! The woman who rules the house, the statesman who appears to have all the threads of the government of the world in his hands, the scholar who investigates the most abstruse subjects, the artisans and labourers who provide for the immediate wants of their fellow-men—all these, if they are Christians, are striving after the kingdom of God that Christ preached and founded, and are concerned in the words of their Lord: "Cast out the net." If thou thinkest that thou hast worked long enough, and hast accomplished little or nothing, then these words only concern thee the more. But perhaps thou hast not yet really taken to heart those other words of the same Lord, which the apostles also had to learn again on that day: "Without Me ye can do nothing." Make a trial for once *with* the Lord, for *without* Him no disciple of the Lord can accomplish anything. Perhaps also thou hast set about thy work according

to thine own mind, and hast not followed the counsel of Christ, or thou hast not sought the kingdom of God, but thine own profit and honour. Then hitherto thy work has not been in any sense the fulfilment of thy vocation, and there can have been no promise of blessing. Seek first the kingdom of God in thy work, serve the one Lord who tolerates no other beside Him. Cast out the net once more according to His counsel and command, and thou wilt find, and *the Lord, who is risen from the dead, promises thee rich results from thy work.*

II.

The apostles learnt this the same morning. A whole night's work without their Lord, and no result; a speedy draught, at His command and advice, so big that they could scarcely land the fish. Jesus Himself suggests that they should count the fish, and it seems to have been a special miracle that their net did not break in spite of the number and size. But it all came to pass as an ensample, and was written for our learning. The event in itself also was of very slight importance for the disciples, but all the more important as an illustration. It was a sure promise of rich blessing on the future work of their calling. This the story is also for us. The promise still holds good for all who, at Christ's command and on His advice, again and again take up the work of their calling, whether their vocation be that of the apostles, by

direct preaching of the Gospel to win over men for the kingdom of God, or work in very different provinces, and with very different means, that God's kingdom may come and God's will be done, and the manifold wisdom of God may be made known upon earth. If we have any calling at all, and if we depend upon Christ when exercising it, Jesus the Risen Lord promises us that we shall have a rich, yea, an amazingly rich blessing therein. When a Christian, who is faithful in his calling, will reap is another question, and one that causes our impatient hearts much anxiety. Only do not let us imagine that all that was promised to the apostles was theirs at once, and that, because we see no miracles, we ought not to hope for great and speedy results. Yes, the apostles' draught of fishes was wonderful, and the work which it cost them was not worth speaking of. But how different was it in the reality of which the picture was shown to them in that hour! Then, indeed, they were not constantly amazed by the great results of their work. They were obliged to be very patient over it, and when we review the whole of their life's work, we find they never lived to see the fulfilment of that day's promise. All the nations on earth, and all the periods of history, are embraced in the work that was set them to do. So they were obliged to fix their eyes in believing hope on the great day of consummation, when the work of every one will be made manifest. They passed away in faithful self-denying work, and died before the great net had been

drawn to shore. Others in their stead entered into their work, and died also, before the coming of the Lord and the great day of harvest. And all who have worked since then, and those who still work in their calling, at Christ's command, must look beyond all the results and failures of time, and wait in faith and patience for the day when all work will be ended, and the results of all work will come to light. But the promise that they should reap in joy concerns them all, yea, that they should marvel at the greatness of the harvest and the untold worth of the work they had been permitted to do. A seed-corn, cast forth by us, may grow to be a blade, and bear a hundred grains of corn while we are resting from our labours. If a mother has never done anything else on earth besides imbuing her child with the faintest idea of the nearness, holiness, and love of God, she has worked for eternity. It will be manifested at the last day. If a teacher should seem to have taught fruitlessly for tens of years, but has nevertheless given to one single man an impulse to free himself from vain folly and to love and acknowledge the truth, he has worked for eternity; his little service, in the complexity of human life, is an essential contribution to the eternal kingdom of truth.

The Lord who gave us this promise, requires indeed of us faith, fidelity, and great patience; but He is also as gentle and loving as He appears in our narrative. He does not let us want refreshment, which will strengthen our faith on the long journey to our goal.

He said to the disciples: "Children, have ye any meat?" It sounded as though He asked them for something for Himself, while they had nothing. But when they had taken their great draught of fishes, He was their host, and they were His guests. They found their breakfast prepared without any addition of their own, and they had only to add, from the fruits of their labours, a contribution of that which He in His goodness had lavished on them. This is both a parable and a promise, the truth of which is proved in the life of every Christian who is true to his vocation. From the undeserved goodness of God, and as the result of our labours, joys spring up for us which are a refreshing foretaste of the last and eternal joy of the faithful servants of the Lord.

If we ask, lastly, on what grounds a Christian may found his faith as to the results of faithful work in his calling, it is now as it was then Jesus, who is risen from the dead, has promised, and He vouches for the fulfilment. His Resurrection is the great turning-point in the history of human work. Till then the words held good: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken." But now the Son of Man is risen from the grave, and calls on all the children of men, who acknowledge Him as their elder Brother, to new work, to work which will not end with the grave. If He had remained in the grave, then all the works of man would have fallen under a double curse: they would then, even far more than formerly, have

been but a sad way of passing time, a means only of forgetting one's self and one's misery. For who ever worked like the soul of Him who alone is holy and righteous? And He would have attained nothing. The faith of the few whose hearts He had won for an incomparably beautiful object in life, would have been destroyed, for all would have been proved to be a deception, and therefore despicable folly. They might perhaps have caught fish for a few more years, but men never, and their words would not have come down to us. But, God be thanked, who sent His Son to us, and who after His Son had worked even unto death, has awakened Him and His work with Him unto new life.

My beloved, it is delightful to keep Easter, and to allow our lives to be transfigured by Easter joy. But do not forget one thing: The Risen Lord, who prepares such joy for us, is also the Lord and Master of our work. He calls to us: "Cast out your nets, and ye shall find." And this is what I have wished to point out to you to-day. But the Apostle Paul has said better than I can, all that should be preached to you to-day. I refer to the last words of his great sermon on the Resurrection, which shall also be the last words of my sermon to you: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Amen.

IX.

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS.

"*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty as a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.*"—1 PET. ii. 11–18.

IX.

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS.

THE words of the Apostle Peter which we have just read, appear at first sight like a string of pearls, each one of inestimable value, and the whole like a costly ornament for every soul that can appropriate it; while that which links them all together seems at first to be only the thread on which they are strung. There might be more of them and we should not consider them superfluous. In fact, the list of apostolical exhortations on Christian behaviour is by no means completed in our text. Even here how many portions there are, of which each is a whole in itself, a text apart, which might well supply us for an hour with food for meditation. It would be possible to preach on the war against fleshly lusts, on the right behaviour of Christians towards their calumniators, on true and false liberty, on the brotherly love and honour due to all, on obedience to the king and all in authority, on the right behaviour of servants to their masters. All these would be fruitful subjects for sermons in accordance with our text. If we wish to look no further than to single texts, the teaching we draw from them need not be especially Christian.

The Apostle speaks intentionally of duties which are considered duties by all civilised men; of virtues and good works which the heathen also praise. This was the natural result of the position of Christians in the world at that time. It was a time when everywhere in the Roman Empire, as never before, the hatred of the non-Christian world was directed against Christians. They were already hated and persecuted as evil-doers, dangerous to the State, and enemies of the existing order of society; for, under the cover of ignorance, all that was scandalous and shameful might be attributed to them, and find credence, even amongst highly cultivated and well-disposed men. There was no need to do anything remarkable, that had never been heard of before by Jews or pagans; but to fulfil all common duties faithfully, and to do the good which all men would praise even though they did it not themselves; for it was just this that was missed in Christians, and it is just by the acknowledgment and fulfilment of the same moral duties that common ground can be found where the professors of different faiths may live together in peace. Therefore the Apostle descends to everyday matters, and things obvious to all, and that had already been enforced by common custom and dictated by prudence; but he descends to them from the highest position a Christian can attain. All that Christians do must be good, if it is to be counted good in the sight of God and to work beneficially in the world. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed

away; behold, all things are become new." It is useless and does not answer for a man to cherish Christian faith in his heart, and to cultivate a few human virtues in his outward life, which may supply the want of others. A man must bring all his strength to bear on the smallest point, and put his whole heart into the most trivial actions, for it is the only way in which all that is good as well as all that is great must be carried out. The art of a Christian life consists also in allowing our external actions to be governed by the holy strength which comes to us through our redemption by Christ, and which establishes peace, joy, righteousness, and life in the hidden depths of our inner being. This, too, is the meaning of the Apostle in our text, and it forms the bond of union which binds all his exhortations together. Peter reminds his readers, before exhorting them to keep any one duty, of the position in which God had placed them by faith in Christ and by the spirit of grace. He exhorts them to do all that they have to do as citizens, members of the family, members of the State, and members of human society, as strangers and pilgrims.

We are in a very different position from the Christians of those days, inwardly, indeed, as well as outwardly. They had been powerfully affected by the absolutely new preaching of the Gospel, and by the spirit of the Christian community which till then had been unknown to them; and, torn from their native soil, they seemed raised to a higher sphere. Hence they could

not at first realise that there were holy bonds which still linked them to the old world, and they were in serious danger of estimating too lightly all that was earthly, worldly, and purely human. The opposite danger lies much closer to us. We are very firmly rooted in our native soil; we are not very likely to doubt about our duties to this world and its ordinances. I can hardly say that we have become naturalised again in this world: I believe we have scarcely yet given up our citizenship. Because the requirements of the Apostle sound so very self-evident, as indeed they were intended to be, so that they might be understood by all, even by the heathen, there is all the more cause to ask, if we also allow the reason to hold good on which Peter grounds his requirement that all should walk honestly in this world. Do not let us err; we do not understand the apostolic exhortations aright, if we do not understand them in this way; and our Yea and Amen are of little worth if the motive from which they proceed, as well as our fulfilment of them, does not become in us the living motive power of all our actions. Otherwise the Lord might say to us also: "What do ye more than others? Do not even the heathen so?" I repeat: *What Christians do must be Christian.* Therefore the first question to which we have to find an answer to-day is: *What do we mean when we say we are strangers and pilgrims?* Then we will ask further: *What meaning does this position give to our whole conversation in the ordinances of our earthly life?*

I.

Christians are strangers and not citizens, pilgrims and not settled inhabitants in this world. This distinguishes them from all who are not Christians, and it ought to give a peculiar impress to their conversation in all the forms and regulations of life on earth. They must be conscious of the difference between themselves and their fellow-men who have their home in this world, or imagine that they have, and who consider it the work of their life to make their birthright tell in this world. Peter did not think it necessary to begin by explaining, first of all, to the Christians living in little communities scattered over the wide territories of Asia Minor, why and wherefore they were pilgrims and strangers, no matter where they lived. He had only to address them by this name, in order to awaken feelings in them to which they were all accustomed. We, the Christians of to-day, have to consider more carefully why these are the right words with which to describe our position in the world. It is true that these words are accepted to a certain extent by every man. Who can deny that we all have no abiding city here on earth; that we must wander ceaselessly whether we will or no; that we cannot bid any moment that pleases us to tarry; and that we shall have to leave every dwelling-place that we should like to make our home, even though we do not wish to do so? And,

even if we lead the quietest life, if we sleep and dream away our time, is it not as though we sat in a chariot which carries us away with the speed of a storm? The world flies past us, and no wish can hold it back.

All human life is like a journey. Many a one starts on this journey full of joyful hope; he looks upon life as a pleasure trip; even though he knows of the struggles, privations, and disturbing incidents which may arise, yet in his youthful strength he considers all of little moment. But at the end most men allow that they have had more gloomy days than bright ones, more heat and dust, more deceit and injustice than joy and enjoyment. Weariness and disillusion are often the end of the journey. But when the love of wandering has not ceased, then it is all the more painful to realise that the journey must have an end. Are these perchance the thoughts that the Apostle wishes to awaken in us? They are certainly useful thoughts, which may preserve us from many a folly. They are like the thoughts of the Psalmist, who confessed, "I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner as all my fathers were," and who said in the same prayer, "Lord, let me know mine end, and the number of my days, that I may be certified how long I have to live." The thought of the end of our life's wandering, and of our involuntary journey hence, may make us wise, may preserve us from the folly of looking upon the transitory blessings of this life

as our lasting possession. It may also admonish us to do our daily work as long as it is day, and also to employ the time granted us for the development of our powers, and for gaining strength for our further journey. But no invigorating and sanctifying power is contained in these self-evident lessons, which can be drawn by every man from his daily experience. The same considerations may lead to crime, which bids us enjoy the pleasures of the moment just because they are so fleeting. Verily, it is by no means the noblest men, who really pass through life as travellers, without any sense of their duty towards their surroundings for the time being, strangers everywhere when it is a question of fulfilling a duty, and at home everywhere if an enjoyment or an advantage can be seized in passing. To others it seems sad that here on earth they can find no abiding city that they can truly call their own. They feel strangers in this world, which mocks at their pretensions, and are even astonished at themselves because they can be joyful again, and take an interest in the events of the day, that they can waste their strength on a world in which they must remain as guests and strangers, till they are at last banished from it. This is pessimism, and it is not the most ignoble men of whom it takes possession. If only we could say of all those who are the prey of such melancholy, and who acknowledge, in their way, that they are strangers and pilgrims in this world, what the Scriptures say

of the patriarchs of the Old Covenant, who also confessed that they were guests and strangers upon earth: "For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a better Fatherland."

Pessimism has no more right to a place in the inner life of a Christian than frivolity. Besides, the Apostle is not a preacher of change and of death, but of hope and of life. He begins his Epistle with the praise of God, "which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." Nothing is feebler than pessimism, nothing stronger than Christian joy, which springs from faith in the Resurrection of Christ. We kept Easter three weeks ago, and we, with our church services, are still in the midst of the Church's joyful season which follows Easter. Have we been strengthened afresh, by the renewed remembrance of the Resurrection of the Lord, to a lively hope, and confirmed in the joyful possession of our heavenly inheritance? Then, and then only, can we sympathise with him, and understand what it means when the Apostle exhorts us to conduct ourselves well in all the ordinances of our life on earth. Whoever lives in faith in the Resurrection of Jesus is a stranger and pilgrim on earth in quite another sense from the patriarchs and righteous men of the Old Covenant. And he is so chiefly because he is a citizen of

another world, and an inhabitant of a heavenly city. If it were only by our own self-made thoughts that we sought to raise ourselves above this present world, and to build ourselves a state and a city of God in the clouds, perhaps we might then be strangers in this world, but our citizenship in another and better world would be as much a dream as the other world itself. We should have to make our involuntary journey through the world, without any knowledge of the world in which God has placed us, without the presence of the Spirit, without any steadiness and safety on our way. For what can our thoughts do in opposition to the rude realities with which we must daily come into contact! But thanks be to God, He has not given us over to our own thoughts, but has carried out His own.

God has satisfied the longings of the restless wanderers and the homeless strangers with His deeds of love and peace. He sent His own Son into the world that was estranged from Him. The Son knew whence He came and whither He went, and yet He did not estrange Himself from the world and its citizens. He showed us the way from the far-off country of this world to His Father's house; yea, and He smoothed the way for us, in that He travelled over it Himself, through the world to God, through death to life. Since He rose from the dead and went to His Heavenly Father, His Father's house in heaven has become the home of

all those whom the Son of God was not ashamed to call His brethren.

If Jesus had gone the way of all flesh, and ended His life, like all other men, by death and the grave, then surely all that has been said of an eternal home, a heavenly Jerusalem, and of death as going home, would only be a pleasant picture of pure fancy. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and has gone to His Father as our Leader and the Captain of our Salvation. The risen Prince of Life is Himself the beginning and the firm foundation of a new world. The city of God is built in heaven, and it numbers amongst its citizens not only those who are already safe in it, but those also who are journeying towards it in faith and hope. The kingdom of God, which the Lord Jesus founded, embraces heaven and earth, the living and the dead, the wanderers and those who have returned home; but the centre of gravity of that eternal kingdom is now in heaven; for where the King is there also is the centre of the kingdom. Now the kingdom of which we are speaking plants itself also in this world with its invisible forces, and it has received us all into itself. On the day of our baptism our names were entered on the list of the citizens of this kingdom. But how different is the citizenship of that world and of this! The kingdom of this world does not ask its citizens whether it pleases them or whether they *wish* to belong to it. The

heavenly kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of liberty. No man can ever really become a citizen of this kingdom, and cannot remain in it, unless he wishes it from his heart, and is fully conscious of his position. The world in which we are born keeps us in the dark as to the object and goal, the means and ways, of our unstable life in it. The kingdom of Christ is in itself the clear and definite goal of our lives; it does not leave us in uncertainty about the way that leads to this goal, and more than this, it gives us the strength to assert our heavenly citizenship in this world where we are strangers and pilgrims. The one is inseparable from the other; full citizenship cannot be held at the same time in two kingdoms; our home can be in one only. In the same degree that we familiarise ourselves with the kingdom whose King, Christ, lives in heaven, we also separate ourselves inwardly from this material world and give up our right to its citizenship. If we do this *absolutely*, we do it without any fear of suffering loss; we do it also in the confidence that thus only we can maintain our liberty in this world of violence; and we also do it in joyful thankfulness to God, who has saved us from this present evil world, and has made us strangers in it by calling us into His kingdom.

II.

My beloved, the fear is unfounded which many Christians seem to cherish, that it is dangerous to separate too sharply the citizenship of the kingdom of God from the citizenship of this world, as though any danger really existed of our being induced simply by religion to transfer the centre of gravity of our lives to the invisible world, and thereby to lose our balance in this material world. This fear is vain, for as long as we are creatures of flesh and blood, we are in much greater danger, in the visible reality, of forgetting and losing eternal blessings than the reverse. The fear, too, is foolish that a man who feels himself a stranger in this world must lose the sense of all that is beautiful and good, and which, after all, as the creation and gift of God, adorns the world and enriches the earthly life of the children of men. The figure itself under which the Apostle teaches us to view our earthly life refutes any fear of too much piety. May not the wanderer who passes through a strange land see anything beautiful there, and may he not rejoice in its blessings? I should have thought that he would have been better able to value them than the settled inhabitant who clings to the soil. The notion, too, is absolutely wrong, that Christians who know and feel that they are citizens of another world, and therefore only look upon themselves

as strangers and pilgrims here, must therefore be less skilful and eager to fulfil their tasks in this material world, and to carry out its ordinances. Men have judged thus of Christians since the days of the apostles, and the baptized and unbaptized who are not Christians, and who think thus, can only be refuted by practical proofs to the contrary. This is the way shown us by the Apostle Peter. It is by proving ourselves to be strangers and pilgrims in all the human ordinances of the State, in our life as citizens and at home, that we may at last succeed in presenting a picture of life to the heathen and the Jews, which will no longer rouse them to slander and blasphemy, but to the praise of God.

Two men may do the same thing, and yet it is not the same. It cannot and ought not to be the same whether a godless citizen of the world, or a pilgrim of the heavenly Fatherland, obeys authority, honours the king, or carries out the commands of his good or froward superiors, while showing to each one all the honour due to him, and loving the brethren. A Christian who does not forget his heavenly home gains a freedom from all earthly powers, of which no man of the world can boast; it also gives him an incentive to faithfulness which no other motives can supply. *Freedom* and *faithfulness*—these two words describe to us the way in which the citizens of the kingdom of Christ walk in the ordinances of this world.

Freedom from the world, and from all its spiritual and fleshly powers, becomes ours directly we feel and know that God is our Lord, and that we are His servants. Freedom is ours whenever we acknowledge the will of God, not only in its holiness, greatness, and beauty, but also when we feel in ourselves the longing and strength to do the will of God. Freedom from the world and fearlessness in it are ours, whenever we are sure by the grace of God that our sins are forgiven, and that our whole life will be guided by God's love and wisdom to a blessed end. But this freedom must be jealously guarded as long as we are pilgrims in the world.

The worst enemies of our freedom are not the opposers of our faith, or the injustice of human rulers, or the wants and cares of this life, but "the fleshly lusts which war against the soul." There is no need to provoke these enemies, they are here already, and are on the look-out for strife; and the prize of the conflict is always our freedom as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. This conflict cannot be fought out in a short time. It is a youthful delusion to imagine that in mature life, or in the midst of our life's work, strength to withstand will grow of itself, or that our passions, which make us the servants of sin, will decay. The conflict does not begin all at once along the whole line of our being, so dangers creep in unawares, when we thought we had long been

safe. By God's mercy, none of us can see into the hearts of others, and trace out their secret thoughts and desires; but we can and we ought to try our own hearts, and we must not forget that our Christian freedom will become the cloke of our sin as soon as our thoughts are stained with sinful desires.

We must also keep ourselves free with regard to human ordinances and earthly powers which have been placed over us by God. The Apostle calls the State, and all who have authority under the king, a human ordinance or arrangement, when referring to the Roman emperor as head, and the whole army of officials as his instruments. He does not thereby contradict the Apostle Paul, who teaches that all authority is ordained by God. Neither does he disparage authority, for he wishes to impress upon Christians that it is their holy duty to be subject to authority, and to honour the king. He wishes also to remind us that the State and all authorities are not Christian, but things that are common to all men. They do not belong to the kingdom of grace and of redemption, but to the kingdom of creation and the government of the world by God. Therefore Christians ought to rejoice thankfully in all the blessings which they, in common with their fellow-subjects, enjoy, under the protection of the legal ordinances of the State. Thankfulness to God who made all these ordinances for the protection of all that is good, and the restraint

of all that is evil, should be shown by the faithfulness with which they support them, as far as in them lies. A Christian who knows that all earthly things are in the hand of God, evinces his faithfulness in a way very different from that of a man of the world, whose highest law is his own personal advantage. A Christian will also remain faithful even though the authorities do not act as he thinks right. For the Lord's sake he can honour the king and be subject to the authorities, even when they are neither good nor gentle, but very froward men. A Christian can act thus without degrading himself by becoming the slave of man, because he is the servant of God, and therefore free from all idolatry of human ordinances. Like worldly men who not only do so, but often require other men to do so too, a Christian cannot confine his thoughts and desires, his love and hope, to the ordinances of an earthly state, for he is the citizen of a kingdom that is not of this world. Higher to him than all the kingdoms of this world is the kingdom of the King who is in heaven. Higher in his estimation than the nation to which he belongs by birth, speech, and history, is the companionship of those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and have been gathered out of all nations into the one people of God. The negro, who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ with me in faith, is my brother, and stands infinitely nearer to me than the German who blasphemes my Saviour.

I know well, and you do also, that in these days

we often hear words of similar import spoken by Roman Christians, though we cannot allow that their wishes and intentions are right. They also say that the kingdom of God is more to them than all the kingdoms of this world; that the Church is holier to them than nationalities; that God must be obeyed rather than man, but we do not see them acting like pilgrims and strangers in this world. The kingdom of God which they exalt above all states and peoples is itself a kingdom of this world, and maintains itself by very worldly means. The will of God which they assure us they obey is a very human compilation; and the service of God, which keeps Christians free from every form of slavery, is nowhere to be found amongst them, but only a human slavery which rouses our pity. They do not show their freedom from the laws of the State as the Apostle requires of Christians; they do not give other men who are not of their faith much cause to praise God for their good and useful works. Are we therefore to be suspicious of the sacred words which they misapply? Are we therefore to give up the grand truth that the Christian's Fatherland and citizenship is in heaven, and not on earth? When we hear and read the answers commonly given now to these Roman pretensions, Evangelical Christians stand convicted too; for truth is not separated from its abuse; and it is truth itself which is inseparable from living Christianity, faith in the one eternal kingdom of God and of Christ, and in the surpassing worth of

citizenship in this kingdom, which is rejected. Though this truth is misapplied by one man, and ignored by another, let us only exalt it all the more. If we preserve the freedom which we possess in this world as strangers and pilgrims, we shall be able to show our faithfulness, when the faithfulness of the citizens of this world commonly ceases. We shall still honour the king when his flatterers forsake him; we shall still pray for the king, when those who have lost hope of gaining any more honours or advantages from him, despise him. And it is yet to be seen who loves his Fatherland and his country best, the man of the world who knows no other Fatherland besides his earthly one, and no higher lord than his earthly king; or the Christian who serves God the Lord, and travels on as a pilgrim and stranger through this world and its ordinances, to the heavenly and eternal Fatherland.

Let us jealously guard the freedom to which God has called us, and for which Christ has set us free; and then we shall also show forth the faithfulness which is well pleasing to God and man in all human ordinances.

"Courageous be against the foe,
And faithful to the end;
That, freed from all things here below,
Thy thoughts to heaven ascend."

Amen.

X.

THE WORD OF TRUTH.

"*Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*"—*Jas. i.* 16–21.

X.

THE WORD OF TRUTH.

TWO very different notes are struck by the verses which have just been read. It seems as though the one ought to tune our hearts to thankful joy for the goodness of God, and the other to very solemn meditation on our own depraved nature. If we assent when we hear that all good and perfect gifts are from above, and come down to us from the Father of lights; if we remember that all that comes to us from God is verily a good and perfect gift; and if, moreover, we can fully say with James: The eternal Father of light and life has begotten us, according to His gracious will, has given us a new birth, so that we may be His children, has made us the first-fruits of His creatures, and set us as kings and priests over His world—what else can we do but praise God as our Heavenly Father? This note is in keeping with the present season, the time of joy for the community between Easter and Whitsuntide. The very names of the Sundays in our calendar—last Sunday was called Jubilate and to-day Cantate—appeal to us to sing praises to the Lord. Even Nature comes to our aid. This year, after long delay, she has suddenly

awakened in peculiar loveliness; how seldom she dons her festal robe of blossoming beauty, and while the religiously-minded rejoice in her, they also rejoice in their God as the kind Giver of all these good gifts.

But in the same short passage in which our thoughts are thus directed, James strikes a very different note. He speaks, too, of very unpleasant things. He speaks of the filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness which are to be found amongst us, and also of unseasonable talk, and pernicious wrath. Before pointing us to God, as the Giver of all good things, he cries to us in warning, "Do not err, beloved brethren," and he closes with the exhortation, "Lay aside all filthiness and wickedness." What is the meaning of this, my beloved? James was certainly a man of intense earnestness; he did not make any allowances for the Christians to whom he wrote; he rebuked their sins with the fiery zeal of the old prophets. But yet it cannot have been his intention, in the same breath, to remind us of the inexhaustible goodness and mercy of the Heavenly Father, in order to tune our hearts to joy and thankfulness, and then to bring to our remembrance our own depravity in order to preserve us from an excess of joy. There are so few joyous people, so few joyful Christians. And there cannot be too much Christian joy; the higher it rises, the higher it raises us; the more uninterruptedly it fills us so much the better for us. "Rejoice in the Lord alway," says the Apostle

Paul, and James and Paul, and all right-minded preachers in the Christian community down to the present time, have not considered it their task to damp a joyful spirit in the community by rebukes and censures, but to be the partners in joy of their fellow-Christians who confess the same faith with them. But to this must be added the warning against the errors and depravity which spoil the joy of so many Christians in their God and His gifts. In a passage immediately before our text, James had referred to a dangerous, yea, an awful error, and without reference to that passage the words of our text cannot be properly understood: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God." There were Christians then, as now, who always succumbed to the same temptations, by sinning now against the truth, now against love, and now against purity, and who would finally excuse themselves to others and to themselves by saying: "I could not help it, and I cannot help it; it is just my nature, and circumstances oblige me to do it." That is a mighty error, because there is truth in it.

The circumstances under which we Christians have to live our lives are not what they ought to be. The world is lying in evil. And our inherited nature is most certainly not what it ought to be. It is just the most religious Christians who have felt this the most deeply, and have most often confessed: "I know that in me (that is, in

my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." But therefore to say, "I cannot help it," is but idle talk. It is not only a denial of man's nobility and our Christian dignity; it is an absolute slander of the Creator, who created us good and for good; it is blasphemy against the Governor of the world, who is more powerful than the very worst conditions of this wicked world; and a denial of the Redeemer who would lead us on to holiness. Do not err, dear brethren, God tempts no man to evil. No evil comes to us from God, but only good and perfect gifts. But yet those who acknowledge this, and would guard themselves against such blasphemy, need warning against errors which damp their joy in God and in His gifts.

James warns us against two of these errors to-day. Many Christians miss true Christian joy, because they do not estimate the gifts of God aright, and because they do not rightly use the noblest gift of God. James teaches us to regard the Word of Truth as such, by singling out this one of the manifold gifts of God and meditating on it. Let us therefore speak to-day of *the Word of Truth* as the noblest and most indispensable *of the gifts of God.* In so doing let us seek for an answer to the double question—

First: *In what does the surpassing worth of this gift consist?*

Secondly: *What must we do that we may truly possess it?*

May God give us His grace during this hour, that while we are hearing and speaking of God's Word, we may hear and speak His own Word!

I.

All the good that comes to us in this life is a gift from above, and we may not consider any of God's gifts as insignificant, neither our daily bread, nor our rest at night, any hour of well-being, or week of blessed work, or enjoyment of all that is beautiful in nature and art, or the joys of home, the love of our family and the faithfulness of friends; in short, nought of all that is treasured by man as a happiness or a blessing may we as Christians accept as a matter of course. Our morning hymns, our grace before meat, the verses which little children learn as prayers from their mothers, should be said by old as well as young. It shows a very hardened heart and one that has wandered far from God, when these gifts are accepted coldly and silently without any thought or thanksgiving. But for us who have met together in the House of God, and thus acknowledge that we cannot live and die without God, doubt or error can scarcely arise as to such simple truths. All that gives us joy in our lives, and, more than all, joy itself, is a gift from heaven, a gift from our God which is worthy of thanks.

And yet it is to Christians that the words are

spoken in the very presence of the manifold gifts of God: "Do not err, beloved brethren." The Father of lights will not allow us to grope about in darkness and clutch blindly at His gifts; we must distinguish between them, estimate them rightly, and accept them as He intended.

Now we cannot do this if we make the happiness of our lives dependent upon those gifts of God which He, in the riches of His goodness, pours out on the evil as well as the good. Are the people always happy and joyful to whom a peculiarly large measure of these goods has been allotted? And are not the men to whom but little has been given, to be happy and joyful? Let us take the blessing of health which is so much belauded and is so often longed for: who is always well, and who remains so to the end? Are the noble and faithful souls, who pass their lives in bodily weakness and pain, to be less happy than the mean, sordid souls whose bodies are overflowing with health? It ought not to be so, and, God be thanked, it is not so. Or do we think of the work of our calling? One sees great results, another but little that is perceptible. Certainly every man, in whose heart glows a spark of piety, when he sees that God prospers the work of his hands and crowns it with His blessing, will transform all his joy in it into a sacrifice of thanksgiving. But when we are not so successful, are we therefore to hang our heads? In our home life and in social intercourse there

are many hindrances and much to sadden the happiness of our lives, from the little vexations and petty troubles to afflictions which wound us severely; checks in the outer and sufferings in the inner life, which even a religious man cannot help feeling, and under which the most loving hearts, and those which need love most, suffer most keenly. But ought or dare a Christian therefore to be unhappy? Oh, we see so many gloomy faces and hear so many discontented words! I am not going to refer to those wearisome people who love nothing better than talking of their own sorrows and needs, or of the proud people who always find the cause of all their misfortunes in others instead of in themselves. But even humble and thankful men, who feel deeply and who gladly acknowledge that God has given them in this earthly life infinitely more than they have earned or than they deserve, often do not show the joyfulness which beseems the children of God. The earth is not empty and bare over which the Father in heaven reigns, and heaven above us is not chary of its gifts. Therefore, if our life, in spite of all this, still seems poor and dreary, it can only be because we do not estimate the gifts of God aright, we do not know how to value His most noble gift, perhaps we do not really possess it, it may be scarcely desire it—the Word of Truth which is planted in our midst. Man does not live by bread alone, or by art or science, the culture of his mind, or the successful use of

his talents. He does not live either by the happiness of his home, or by honour in the sight of other men. You know what our Lord once said, when a woman, in the midst of the people who hung upon His words, lifted up her voice and called the mother blessed who had borne such a son. It was certainly great joy to that mother to see her Son working as a teacher and helper of His people. Jesus did not rebuke the woman who called His sorrowful mother happy. But neither did He agree with her. He said: "Blessed are they which hear the Word of God and keep it." Yea, verily, those only are happy on earth and blessed in eternity, who hear the Word of God and keep it.

Of all the things which we receive as the gifts of God, His Word is really the noblest and most indispensable gift. If God is silent to us, the world also is silent, a knot of tormenting riddles, and finally a burden which crushes us. He who investigates Nature, and endeavours to fathom her secrets with all the aids that the human search after knowledge has discovered, will not find any answer in this way to the question which no one can repress: What is man? Why is he here? and what is his end? Man feels defenceless in the presence of the forces of nature, in the presence of the innumerable, and for the unaided eye, invisible enemies of life; he is a beast, and in many respects more helpless than the beasts; the food of worms, and himself a worm. There is only one thing that

he seems to possess above all other creatures, and that is that he knows his miserable lot, and that he cannot help craving for something beyond. Therefore man must be unhappy if he does not hear the voice from above: "Thou art My child, begotten according to My will, created in My image for eternal life, that thou mayest be the firstborn, yea, the lord of all creatures." He who hears such a voice, and recognises it as the voice of his Father, will find that it is a Word of Truth which will save him from despair.

There are other questions also that torment us and may cause us to despair, if God does not give us an answer. However confused our thoughts about God, the world, and ourselves may be, yet every one who is not absolutely degraded, hears *one* word within: "Thou shalt;" and with that another always associates itself: "Thou doest not that which thou oughtest to do, thou art not that which thou oughtest to be." But how then is man, who cannot deafen this inner voice, to believe the voice from above which says to him: "Thou art My child"? How can I, who daily and hourly lag so far behind what I ought to be, raise my eyes to the Father of lights? Yes, how can I rejoice in His gifts and discern a Father's love in them if I still feel that He is unknown to me, and that I have wandered far from Him? I am not worthy to be called His child. Only God's voice and Word can save me from this painful position. Man only is happy and

blessed when he hears again and again a voice from above which says to him: "Thou art lost, but still My child, if thou wilt but return home a prodigal son whom the Father will clasp in His arms." Every Christian child knows the story; oh that every Christian man experienced it! The father overwhelms the son with proofs of his love; he orders the best robe to be given to the ragged vagabond; he puts a ring on his hand; he prepares a feast for him. The son rejoices in all this, but how different his rejoicing is now and when he was living in his father's house; he has learnt how to estimate aright the blessings of life. Infinitely more precious to him than the best robe, the gold ring, and the festal meal, is the love of the father who forgives him his great sin, and the words in which the love and the joy of the father are poured forth: "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Blessed is he who hears such words, and recognises the voice of the Father in them, treasuring them as words of truth and life. Therefore let us thank the Father in heaven, that to all His other good gifts He has added the Word of Truth, and has implanted it in our midst that our souls may be saved.

Or can a preacher, nowadays, no longer say to the community what James said to his hearers: "The word which is implanted in you"? When we talk of the Word of God, we first think of the Bible. Certainly the Bible is the Word of

God reduced to writing for His community, and far be it from me, or any other Evangelical preacher, to undervalue the worth of the Bible. It is quite impossible to imagine what would become of the preaching of the Gospel, of our Divine worship, of the Christian instruction of the young, and of theology, if we did not possess this book of books. But James is not speaking of the Bible. I will only refer in passing to the fact that there was no New Testament in existence when James wrote the Epistle from which our text is taken, and which is perhaps the earliest of all the writings which are contained in our New Testament. The Christians of his time possessed only the Bible of the Jewish people, the Old Testament. The most precious part of our Bible was not as yet in existence, that in which the whole course of the salvation of God was first revealed and our perfected redemption was proclaimed. But though we now possess the Gospels and the written testimony of the apostles, we may not speak of the Bible as James speaks of the Word of Truth. We cannot say of any book, even the holiest and the most indispensable: This book can save us; By this book the Father hath begotten us again, so that we may be His children. Neither can we say of this book that it is implanted in us or amongst us. The Bible is widely circulated amongst us; it is a cheap book. Would to God it were more read by individuals

and in families! Many do not even seem to know what an interesting book the Bible is; it is a book full of life and spirit, yea, of the Holy Spirit and of Divine life. But still it is a book consisting of words and letters, and the letter killeth. The bitterest enemies of Jesus, the scribes and the Pharisees, honoured the Bible most highly. They possessed an amazing knowledge of the Bible, and yet the Lord must say to them: "Ye have never heard the voice of God, and ye have not His Word abiding in you. Ye think that ye have eternal life in the Scriptures, and ye will not come to Me that ye may have life." It is possible to honour the Bible and to read it diligently, and yet not to hear the voice of God or to possess His Word. The Word of Truth, which saves us and makes us the children of God, comes, like all good gifts, from the Father of lights, and is not cut off from the source from whence it flows. It has come to us children of men in the Son of God, who was and is Himself the living Word of God. It was planted in the hearts of men by the Spirit at Whitsuntide, and has taken root in the community of Christ. It is a wonder of the grace of God, amazing indeed and worthy of thanksgiving, that this health-giving Word, in spite of all the weakness of human preachers and teachers, in spite of all the misunderstandings of Bible readers, in spite of all the errors, which even amongst us Christians are still powerful, should

now be living and fruitful amongst us, that God should still speak to us, and call us by His own Word out of darkness into light, and lead us out of despair unto salvation.

II.

My beloved! If we do not yet know how to value this most noble and indispensable gift of God at its real worth, if we still make the happiness of our lives depend upon things that one has and another has to do without, which we have to-day and may lose to-morrow, and if we therefore are not truly happy men and joyful Christians, it may be, perhaps, because we are leaving undone what God expects of us when He speaks to us. James says: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak—and receive with meekness the ingrafted word." It is not speaking but hearing which makes man wise, rich, and blessed. It is also true that men must speak so that other men may hear the voice of God. God does not refuse to allow His Word to be proclaimed by the mouth of sinful man. When I think of the young friends who are preparing in our town to be hereafter preachers of the Divine Word of the Lord, and to minister to His community, it almost seems as though it were doubtful advice to say to them: "Let every man be slow to speak." Ought we not rather to say: Be zealous preachers of the Word of God, and be

ready at all times to proclaim joyfully the word of salvation? And yet, my friends, allow me to say even to you: "Be ye also quick to hear, but slow to speak." The repetition of Biblical sayings, tacking on to them a few wise or foolish thoughts, and weaving in a few flowers of rhetoric, cannot be called proclaiming the Word of God. Again, the warmth of imagination and the fervour shown by men who are talking at random, and still more the anger with which the sins and follies of this wicked world are condemned, do not produce that which is right in the sight of God, and for the good of His community. Whoever is to proclaim the Word of God, must first fear and tremble in the presence of this most holy task, like the great Prophets of old.

But, first of all, he must *hear* a Word of God, that he may be able to *preach* the Word of God. He must receive in order that he may give. Certainly it is necessary that men should not give up searching and living in the Scriptures, but, as I have already said, it is not every one who reads and studies the Scriptures, be he learned or unlearned, who also hears the Word of God. And yet all depends upon this. He only is, and he only can be, a preacher of the Divine Word, who is always, and above everything else, a "hearer of the Divine Voice." He must be ready to hear it at all times, and when he is not, he must wrestle in prayer, he must pray with the Psalmist: "Unto Thee will I cry, O Lord, my rock; be not silent

unto me." Like young Samuel, he must cry: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." It is only thus that any one can become a preacher of the Word of God. But to all of us also, my beloved, even though we have to confess that the Word of God is not the costly gift and the blessed strength, which have been extolled by the faithful of all ages, let it still be said: "Let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak."

Here in church it may seem superfluous to give a warning against much speaking, and to admonish all to be meek and willing hearers, for here always there is only one who speaks, while the rest are silent and listen. But do all these patient hearers hear the Word of God? I believe there is many a one in church who does not hear the Word of God, because he does not seek it, because he is by no means ready and desirous to hear the voice of God. He wishes to hear the preacher, and for his patient hearing he makes amends to himself, afterwards, by talking all the more, and also by speaking of and judging the preacher and the sermon. If the preacher does not suit him, the hearer stays away, and it is very questionable whether he often tries to provide himself with a substitute when he stays at home. God's Word is not indeed confined within the walls of the church. When we sing in the assembled community,

> "Let us fall down, for God is here,
> In worship, love, and holy fear,"

surely we must not forget that God is present everywhere, and that His health-giving Word, which is engrafted amongst us, has many ways and means of drawing near to us. But it is nevertheless true everywhere, that he who acknowledges that all the gifts of God cannot make him joyful and blessed if the Heavenly Giver is silent to him; that he who longs again and again to receive the Word of God from the source of truth, which promises him forgiveness of sin, adoption as the child of God and eternal life, must be slow to speak and willing to hear. He must, as much as in him lies, shut his ears to the noise of the world and the idle talk of man. He must silence all his own thoughts which rise up within him; he must not avoid the quiet of solitude; nay, he must seek it and love it, that he may be alone with his God. Then the best company will be ours, and the most refreshing communion, when all around and within us is still, and we can think of nothing more to say than the one prayer: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth; speak, that I may see Thee and live." Then we too shall have an answer; we shall hear the voice of God, and receive anew that most indispensable gift of God, the Word of Truth which will save us. Amen.

XI.

CHRIST'S WITNESSES.

"*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you.*"—JOHN *xv.* 26–*xvi.* 4.

XI.

CHRIST'S WITNESSES.

TO-DAY we keep as a quiet Sunday between Ascension Day and Whitsunday. Many, satisfied by the numerous services of the past weeks, either stay at home or go into the country preparatory to the Whitsuntide services, while those who do go to church do not expect a festival sermon, but rather a few words of quiet meditation. When the apostles returned to the city from the Mount of Olives, after the Ascension of the Lord, they did not begin at once to praise the mighty deeds of God, as they did so soon after, or, like our community on Ascension Day, sing songs of triumph to their Heavenly Father, but they all continued with one accord, with the brethren, the mother of Jesus and a few other women, in quiet prayer and supplication. Then it was said to them, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye here gazing up into heaven?" Look at the road which will lead you out over the earth: ye must soon set out. Therefore they prepared themselves by careful thought and unceasing prayer. The power from on high, also, which had been promised to them for their work, was to be looked for and

prayed for. If this Sunday between Ascension Day and Whitsuntide does not of itself rouse in us similar thoughts, the Gospel for to-day which has been read, must surely awaken them in us.

The Lord Jesus, in whose Name we are gathered together, gives us a *commission which we are to carry out in this world, while He does not conceal from us what we have to expect from the world, if we carry it out faithfully.* This would be a hard saying if it were not combined with the promise of Whitsuntide. If we find it to be a hard saying, let it arouse in us a longing for a new and full measure of the Pentecostal blessing.

I.

Jesus said to His disciples: "Ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning." This, I say, is a commission, and a commission given to all Christians, and therefore to us also. Or ought this saying to have been otherwise expressed in order to be understood? Ought the Lord to have said: "Ye *must* be My witnesses"? Jesus said this, too, on many occasions and in many ways. But it seems to me that by expressing His confidence that it will come to pass, He shows still more forcibly that it must be so. Men who had passed through all that the disciples had experienced in common with their Master, could not help bearing witness of all that they had seen and heard. As long as it lived in them as the treasure of their hearts, it

would force them with irresistible power to let their mouths overflow with all that filled their hearts. And again, in another sense, those who had known and experienced that Jesus was the Saviour, would be obliged to testify of Him. The Lord who had said of Himself, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth," that faithful witness even unto death, did not make the twelve apostles only sharers of His calling, but all His disciples. They could no longer be scholars who followed the Master, unless in some measure they bore witness to the truth. Jesus needed men also to carry on His office as witnesses if His work on earth was to be continued after He had departed thence. When the men in authority required Him on Palm Sunday to command His disciples to be silent, and to put an end to all the loud rejoicings amid which He made His entry into the Holy City, as though all were only noisy uproar, He replied: "If these should hold their peace, the stones would cry out." It was necessary that He should be acclaimed; the loud witness of men must resound, when this King made His entry. It is true that men are not the only witnesses to Christ and His truth on earth. Jesus said: "*Ye also* must bear witness"; therefore it was not only the disciples who were to do it. A higher power lives in the community; a power from on high reigns here below which outlives all the generations which pass away—this is the Spirit of truth

which Jesus promised, and which He has also really sent. This Spirit has created forms for Himself in which He also comes, and bears witness to men who know little or nothing of Him. As witnesses to saving truth, the so-called Christian world possesses the Holy Scriptures, the History of the Church, the Creed of the Fathers, and the most glorious Church hymns of all times. It is surrounded and hedged in by institutions and ordinances, which bear witness that Jesus created something new on earth which will not die, in spite of all the over-hasty announcements of its death. By the side of all these things stand the words of Christ: "Ye also must bear witness," and ye will do it. It could not, in fact, be otherwise, for the kingdom which Christ established is a kingdom of individual spirits. It maintains itself and grows by no other means or powers than those by which it was first rooted in earth. Our Lord did not bring a new doctrine, a New Testament, or a Catechism to us men that we might be made holy thereby, but He Himself, the living Man and the Son of God as a Person influenced other persons, drawing, winning, yea, overcoming and transforming them. By His personal witness in word and work, in deed and in suffering, He convinced men of the truth which had in Him become a Person, and He thus made them citizens of a new world, whose Head He is Himself. This is the kingdom for which all men must be won, and to which we,

as members of Christendom, have already been called.

The Lord has now ascended up to heaven. We lack the perceptible impression made by His powerful personality, and to many who bear His name He is dead. The apostles, who, as witnesses, continued His work on earth with such wonderful results, are dead, and learned men dispute to what extent we still possess the uncorrupted witness of Christ and His apostles in the New Testament. The Fathers have long since passed away to whom our Evangelical Church owes her Confession and the forms of her services, and their times are not our times. Many find it as difficult to accept their Confession as the written words of the apostles. Again, is it not true that only the living are considered to be in the right? Jesus does not deny this. He, the Living One, says to the living: "Ye must bear witness." The witnesses of the days of old still speak to those who are willing to hear them, and when we wish to explain to ourselves how it is that now and then a verse of the Holy Scriptures, or a hymn, stirs our hearts, we shall always find the cause in the personal form of the true Life. It is above all the Person of the Lord Jesus who comes in the flesh to meet us in the Gospels, and who looks at us in such a way that we cannot escape His gaze. It is the personal form which Christ has taken in a Paul; it is the personal and courageous faith of a Luther; the loving

Christian joy of a Paul Gerhardt, which lays hold of us. But yet how feeble is the influence of these witnesses now upon us, the men of to-day! How far from us and how high above us they stand! Like a cloud of witnesses, they look down from heaven upon us on this earthly stage where the struggle has been ordained for us. It is as though they asked us: "Are ye also witnesses, as we were in our time, and as the Lord expects and demands of you?"

No other words are needed to show that the demand of Jesus concerns all Christians of all times. Here most certainly the words of our Lord hold good: "What I say unto you, I say unto all." But unquestionably the demand first of all concerns preachers by profession, and young students of theology who are preparing themselves for such a calling. There are some such among us. Let me say to you, my young friends, ye also must bear witness. I will not stop to speak of the sad sight which may be seen now, as in olden times, of not a few who enter on theological studies and the clerical office, who do not seem ever to have given it a thought that they have chosen a solemn, holy, and even difficult calling. I am thinking of those more noble-minded men, whose hearts are sincere, and who consider it a noble aim in life to be able hereafter to serve God by proclaiming His Word to the community. May they indeed all hear it and take it to heart that they must

be witnesses for Christ: nothing more and nothing less than this. To be a witness is not to be a judge, who must first find out the truth and then give judgment. In the great lawsuit between Christ and the world, between Christianity and anti-Christianity, right and truth have long since been found, and the Judge has been appointed long ago who is to bring right and truth to light and to enforce them. We are to be witnesses, but that does not mean that we are to be the impeachers or the accusers of unbelievers and of the wicked world. They have accusers enough; they have laws enough which will accuse them as transgressors; they accuse each other. In their hearts, too, thoughts rise up which accuse and excuse one another. We are to be witnesses, but that does not mean that we are to play at being advocates, so that by the skilful marshalling of proofs, or even by the art of rhetoric, we may assist justice and truth to gain the victory. The office of a witness is a much more modest one. The witness ought to say what he knows of the matter, what he has seen and heard, and has, in fact, himself actually experienced, and of which he is therefore as sure as he is of his own existence. Therefore no one can be a witness for Christ who has as yet known and experienced nothing of that to which he is to bear witness, but who only repeats what he has heard said, and only teaches others what he has learnt from other men. And though he were to expound correctly

the profoundest doctrines of the Church, and to take the most glorious texts of the Bible and the most spiritual verses of hymns and weave them into a wreath, with a few flowery sentences of his own invention, he would still be only as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal; he would be like a blind man who praises the splendour of colour.

But are we then so poor in truth that we have known for ourselves, that we can no longer be witnesses? There are many even at the present time of whom the Lord can say, in a certain sense, what He said of His apostles, "Ye have been with Me from the beginning," many who have grown up in faith from childhood, and who, by the grace of God, have kept the faith to the present day. Has nothing then been experienced in such a life? To others light has only risen late in life. After a life of thoughtless indifference, or even of antagonistic unbelief, the Gospel has laid hold of them. They ought therefore, like Paul, who was converted late, to be able to testify all the better, from their own conscious experience, that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Not as though we ought to relate our personal experiences to others: we must preach not ourselves, but Christ, but still Christ as we have known Him. The great witnesses and heroes of olden times, to whom we latter-day Christians look up wonderingly and thankfully, must not deter any of us from being conscious of our calling as

witnesses, but neither should they betray any one into saying more than his heart and conscience allow. Even the words of the prophet in the Christian community must be regulated by the measure of the prophet's faith. Woe to that witness who says more than he knows from his own experience: he also is a false witness. Blessed is he who does not shut up within himself the truth that he has made his own. It is less important for us at all times to embrace all that belongs to Christianity, than to have the kernel of the Gospel really in our hearts and to confess it whole-heartedly with our mouths. A sacred poet once said—

> "One thing I know that comfort gives,
> All else is insecure:
> I know that my Redeemer lives;
> His faithfulness is sure."

This is not great knowledge, but if it is true, is it not a powerful Easter sermon? The Apostle Paul also said on one occasion, that he knew of nothing else to preach save Christ crucified. And yet, in the same Epistle, he solemnly testified that Christ could help none if He had not risen from the dead. Perhaps many a young theologian, whilst he stands beneath the Cross, acknowledges that the atonement which took place there is still an unsolved riddle to him, and perhaps he knows nothing more about it from his own experience than the heathen centurion, who said beneath the Cross:

"Certainly this was a righteous man." But this, if spoken in truth, may become an edifying Good Friday sermon, just as the words,

> "No sin like ours hast Thou e'er wrought;
> Of evil deeds Thou knowest nought,"

are a sacred song. No Christian can escape from the duty of witnessing, by saying that he has no confession ready and complete. It will not do to say that he has no vocation and opportunity for witnessing to his faith, because he is not a theologian and preacher, and has no desire to become one. The words, "Thou must also bear witness," concern every father and mother who wish to leave their best to their children. And here there is no especial dread of the appearance of self-assertion to be overcome. It is true that in many, though by no means in all Christian homes, very simple forms of grace, which have been inherited from days gone by, and which bear witness to the truth, are no longer heard. But there are still many houses where a grace is said before meals, and not only as an exercise for the little ones, but as the priestly blessing of the father of the family. Perhaps a passage of the Bible or a hymn is read, and the Lord's Prayer is repeated. It is possible so to say a grace or the Lord's Prayer that none can join; but both may be said with such simplicity, that those who join by folding their hands realise that they are standing in the presence of God,

and become willing to seek the face of God for themselves. When all such forms have been given up, and men are too shy to begin them again, there are still plenty of opportunities every day, even without taking part in the public worship of God, for bearing witness to the one thing needful. How a man does his work, how he bears good and bad days, how he accepts honour and dishonour from other men, how he speaks of men and things and of great events, and of all the little experiences of other members of the household—all these things, if done in a Christian way, must speak in intelligible language to those from whom we neither wish nor are able to hide ourselves. If there is any living trust in God in us, any humble Christian faith, any joyful Christian hope, we must at last make some impression on the receptive minds of those who are growing up—an impression that will never fade. We need not be either saints or angels, and yet we may be able so to live that our children can say of us when we are no longer with them: "My parents, it is true, were neither perfect people nor perfect Christians, but they sought to know the will of God in all the perplexities of life; even in dark days they believed in the love of God; and, in the presence of death, the grace of Christ, who came to save sinners, was their consolation." Would that be no effectual witness? I believe that such a witness has produced as much faith in the world as all the preaching from the

pulpit. Let us begin with little things; let us accustom ourselves, when opportunities come unsought, not to conceal unnaturally all that is best in us, but to express it simply; opportunities will then increase, and strength will grow by exercise. We shall then become witnesses, according to the measure of the grace given us by God, who will not allow our mouths to be closed, even though at times our witness brings us enmity or sorrow.

II.

The Word of the Lord and the experience of all times teach us that there can be no exemption. Jesus said: "They will excommunicate you. The time will come that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." This does not sound encouraging, and yet the disciples were so sad that it seemed as though only consoling words would be suitable for them. Jesus did not say it to discourage them, for though it did not sound joyful to them then, yet it would comfort them at a time when they would be in much greater need of consolation, even when all would come to pass that He had foretold. Then they were to remember all that He had said to them before, that they might not be offended, as though something unnatural and unreasonable had come to pass. It cannot be otherwise; wherever witness is borne to the truth, there also are contradiction, hatred, and persecution. Only what the Lord Jesus ex-

perienced Himself has been repeated in the history of the community. When He was a child He found favour with God and man; when He was a man and mingled with His people, He experienced the contradiction of the teachers and the hatred of the rulers in the same measure in which He freely bore witness to the truth. The first community in Jerusalem also rejoiced at one time in the favour of the people; but as it grew and its witness became clearer and sharper, the blood of the first martyrs flowed. Now, it was not careless, worldly men who first persecuted the Christians even unto death, but the earnest-minded Pharisees, who made the service of God burdensome enough to themselves. They felt outraged in their holiest convictions by Stephen; they believed, in fact, that they were both serving God and doing a holy work when they spilt his blood. Then, when the Christian faith was spread abroad in the Roman Empire, it was under the emperors who possessed most character, and were, in their way, really religious, that the Christians suffered most severely. And, in later times, when the Church was so degenerate that she could no longer bear the witness of the truth, heretics were burnt in the name of the faith.

Let none among you say that these are unnecessary reminiscences of the dark ages, which have passed away for ever, and which have no practical value for us Christians of the present time, at all events in European lands. Let us thank God that He has

given His community peace in our land, and let us pray to Him, as we pray for our daily bread and other earthly blessings, that He will continue to preserve us in peace. Whoever imagines that the Word of the Lord, which throughout so many centuries has been literally fulfilled, is no longer valid, is much mistaken. In German, "martyr" means "witness." Therefore the true witness for Christ must always have something of the martyr in him. A living and faithful witness for Christ will find, sooner or later, that he will have to suffer for his convictions and his testimony. It is in itself no slight suffering to see the truth, which has become a part of his innermost being, despised, or to hear it scoffed at. Neither will he be left unattacked in person. It is not necessary for a Christian to be forward and pressing in the confession of his faith before others who do not understand it; he need only speak when duty calls and silence would be a lie, to find himself excommunicated in certain circles. Yea, when he opposes the fashionable opinions of the time, because the old but eternally youthful truth of the Gospel is dearer to him than the fashionable view and its representatives, he will be excommunicated, and when possible set aside. It is still true at the present time that those who act thus think that they are doing God, or if they no longer believe in God, that they are doing truth a service. The most deadly hatred and the bitterest enmity do not come from careless scoffers, but from people who have serious convictions, and

who wish to see truth, as they understand it, victorious. A Christian who expects to experience this, must not be in haste to call himself a martyr. He ought rather to prove himself earnestly, whenever he is attacked on account of his convictions or his testimony, whether he be not suffering on account of his folly or his own fault. But he must not be terrified if at last it should become plain that he has been excommunicated because he bore witness to the truth given us by Jesus Christ. Jesus said: "These things have I spoken unto you that ye should not be offended," which means, "that ye should not fail in faith, and that ye should not cease being My witnesses." In other provinces it is not considered honourable to sail with the wind, and to keep back the truth because many will not listen to it. In matters of faith many do not seem to think it a shame to begin by being timidly silent about a truth which has been declared by the leading spirits to be antiquated and discarded, then to explain it away, and finally to sail with the wind which is blowing again the last twenty and forty years, as it blew once before eighty or a hundred years ago. It is certainly more comfortable than swimming against the stream, and it is almost unavoidable for those who are greedy of the honour given by man. Jesus once said to His enemies, who were learned men: "How can ye believe who give honour one to another?" But to us He says: "Ye shall be My witnesses, and ye must not be surprised if your witness displeases many, and ye must

not be offended when ye are excommunicated by men."

Would to God that many would act according to these words! Are we going to do it? The acknowledgment of duty is good, and so are good intentions. But who is able to help us to go on from knowing to willing, and from willing to doing? This can only be done by the Lord who has called us all to be His witnesses. He gave to those who clung faithfully to Him, not only great tasks, but also great strength, and He also promised them a new spirit, a spirit of power and of consolation, a spirit of truth and of witness. The festival of Whitsuntide is close at hand, when we shall thank God our Father that He has proved the truth of this promise of His Son to the community. We pray to-day that we may not be sent empty away. Last Sunday was called "Rogate," which means "pray"; to-day is called "Exaudi," which means "hear." Hear us, O Heavenly Father, when we pray in poverty of spirit, but also in the name of Thy Son, and confiding in Thy mercy. Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us, without whom we cannot call Thee our Father, or Jesus Christ our Lord. Let Him gain power over us anew, and carry out His office as a Witness, so that we too may become witnesses to the truth. Amen.

XII.

THE WATER OF LIFE.

"*In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* (*But this he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.*)"—JOHN *vii.* 37–39.

XII.

THE WATER OF LIFE.

WE are keeping a spiritual feast. We, with all Christians on earth, meditate to-day and to-morrow on an invisible event in the history of spiritual life, while we thank God for His act, and pray to Him for His gifts. Signs that could be both seen and heard were not wanting at that Feast of Pentecost at Jerusalem to which we turn our gaze to-day. But the Spirit, who made His entry there, and established a new life with creative power, was not in the rushing wind that filled the house; nor were the fiery tongues that manifested themselves, those with which all the members of that Pentecostal community praised the mighty works of God. A kindling ray, from the inaccessible heights of divine life, streamed down into the hidden depths of human life, and kindled there a fire from which a few bright sparks shot forth into the outer world. The accompanying signs, which were also visible to strangers, have vanished, and the fact itself, which we celebrate to-day, exists only for those who experience its inner working. The feast of the Spirit can be kept only by those who have become the children of that Spirit. What a very different

kind of feast that was which the Evangelist places before us on its last and most glorious day! The Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, at which we find Jesus in the midst of the throng at the Temple, was not a feast of the spirit, but of nature. It was a joyful national festival on the completion of the fruit-gathering and the vintage. The people rejoiced for seven days in the earthly blessings given them by God. Everywhere, in the courtyards, on the flat roofs, in the streets, booths were made of green branches, in which families and their friends gathered together for festal meals. When they went to sacrificial services in the Temple, they carried palm-branches, wreathed with other foliage, and the finest fruits of the Holy Land in their hands. On each of the seven days a priest went down from the Temple mount, with a golden vessel, to the Pool of Siloam, accompanied by the Temple musicians and countless multitudes of those who had come to the feast. When the priest had filled his vessel with water from the well, all the people sang: "Draw water with joy from the wells of salvation." Then they all returned in a solemn procession to the Temple; there the water was poured out on the altar of burnt-offering; a pitcher of wine was also emptied; the water and wine being a thank-offering to God; and then, amidst loud cries of Hosanna and waving of palms, the endless procession wound round the altar. On the last day of the feast, which was also the most glorious, this procession took place seven times, as though the people could

never weary of rejoicing in God's gifts. It was a national festival, more easily understood by every one than our festival of to-day, for men rejoiced over tangible blessings. It is true to many, even in our own town, that our Christian Whitsuntide has become more a festival of nature than of spirit. Men rejoice in the tender beauty of newly-awakened nature, men are more willing to rest under the green roof of spring foliage than under the stone roofs of rooms and churches. Who would wish to prevent them? and who blames those who take their pleasure therein? Is not all that is earthly pure and good when partaken of with thanksgiving to the Heavenly Giver?

But see! in the midst of the people, who are feasting and rejoicing, there stands a grave Man watching all this coming and going. On the last, the brightest and most glorious day of the feast, He goes to a spot where many must see Him and hear Him, right in the midst of the turbulent throng, amongst the masses who are satiated and drunken with festal joy, and cries with a loud voice: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." Does He wish to disturb the feast? Does He wish to cloud the joy? Assuredly not; that was not His way. So familiarly did He associate with the joyful, that He was reproached with the lack of that holy earnestness which marked John the Baptist. Besides, it was a sacred feast which God's people were keeping according to God's commandment. Jesus Himself had come to Jerusalem to keep the feast with them. He

blames nothing, He forbids nothing, but to that crowd drunk with joy He puts the question: "Is there no one amongst you who is athirst? The water that ye draw from the well is a noble gift of the Creator, but does it quite still the thirst that that same God has roused in your breasts? The branches and the fruit that ye carry in your hands, the foliage under which ye have been dwelling all these days, are witnesses to the goodness of God; but do not ye see how quickly they fade in your hands and above your heads? God's goodness endureth eternally. But where are the gifts which ye can keep for ever, and which can make you eternal? Let him who thirsts for such blessings come unto Me and drink!"

He who thus cried at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem is standing in the midst of us also, for we are assembled here in the blessed Name of Jesus Christ. He stands in the midst of Christendom separated and scattered in space, but gathered together in spirit in His Name. Unseen and unrecognised also He stands amongst the thousands who in these days keep the Feast of Tabernacles but not Whitsuntide, though they have been named in His Name, and called to the life of the Spirit which Christ gives. He it is who to-day, even as yesterday, cries out in all the world: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." Let him who would serve Him to-day in His community reply to Him with the confession: "*Jesus Christ is the source of the life-giving Spirit.*"

He is that source *only for the thirsty;* He became that source in full measure only when *He was glorified and exalted,* and He makes all who come to draw from Him, into *wells of the Spirit to those around them.*

I.

The call of Jesus sounds out into all the world, and to all nations that bear His name, and this call must sound ever louder and louder. But this call of invitation and this word of promise draw a distinction, and separate a certain class of men from all others from the very first—from those who are satisfied and at peace with themselves and the world. It is only the thirsty whom Jesus Christ invites to come to Him as the source from which they can draw spirit and life. Those who have eaten and drunk to the full must become thirsty before they can understand, and certainly before they can take to heart, what it means when a man who has trod this earth bears witness to a whole people, and lastly toall mankind: "I am the inexhaustible well from which all man's longing after life and spirit may be satisfied."

There are men, indeed, who for a time imagine and persuade themselves that they have enough, that there is no reason why they should wish for anything beyond their state of life. Who has not experienced some moments when all desire gave place to deep satisfaction, and nothing was further

from his thoughts than to wish for change in his inner or outer position, whose only wish it was that it might last? But those moments did not last. The men who always give us the impression that they do not wish to be anything more than they are, or to have anything which they do not already possess, are not those whom a wise man would envy. They deceive themselves, or they are deceiving us. Daily experience teaches us that such men do nothing good and nothing great. Wherever anything that is good, great, and beautiful has been produced, it has always been the work of the thirsty souls, of the longing spirits of men who see the image of that which they ought to be far up above them, who reach out longingly towards it, and crave for strength to bear them up. Even the ordinary thirst for possession and enjoyment stimulates man's powers and spurs him on to work. The thirst also for honour and power forces man to self-denial, to self-sacrifice for the common weal. Neither is it otherwise in the realms of art and science. He who only takes up such work as a pastime does not succeed. It is only when the desire for unknown truth becomes a thirst for knowledge, that the veils fall, and the ways to undiscovered worlds are laid bare.

But this is not the thirst that Jesus promises to quench. He speaks, at the sacred feast, in the name of God to the people of God. He speaks to those who, in the holy festal songs of those days, had both

witnessed themselves and had also heard again, that all that the earth gives and time takes away is not enough for man, but that there are, indeed, wells from which flow salvation from God and eternal life. He asks the people of God, when keeping the feast, if there are not some amongst them who are athirst for the living God. He asks us, too, who are now keeping Whitsuntide; and it is only when we are conscious of a longing for spirit and life, like the thirst of a weary wanderer, or a labourer on a scorching day, it is only then that His invitation and His promise concern us.

How is it with us? To every Christian, indeed, it is self-evident, and no truth is so often preached in our Church, or so early impressed on the heart of every Christian child, as the truth that there is no good in us in the sight of that God in whom we live and move, and that we must seek the forgiveness of that merciful God in whom full forgiveness is to be found. And every Christian who has sought and has found this grace in the Son of God, who can speak of the forgiveness of sins as the ground of his soul's peace, and the joy of his life, has yet a further longing, and a longing which is never completely stilled, that he may become worthy of such a state of grace and walk worthily therein. Earnest Christians are daily aware how much they fall behind their example. If we are upright in heart, we never cease hungering and thirsting for righteousness of life whilst on earth.

And our Lord calls those blessed who thus hunger and thirst after righteousness. One day they shall be satisfied. Yea, blessed are they to whom righteousness is as their daily meat and drink, without which they cannot live. Blessed are they who know and so do, knowing that without righteousness they can neither have, nor hope for, true joy or eternal life.

But this is not yet all that a Christian longs for throughout his life; and this is not the right name for the blessing which Christ offers and promises at Whitsuntide to all who thirst. For why do we fall again and again so far below the standard that as Christians we set before ourselves? Why do we so often, with the best will, with a full knowledge of all that is right and good, and under the most favourable circumstances, fail in joy in our work and in confidence that we are making progress in the path of sanctification? Yes, indeed, why do we in many an hour miss the certainty that we and our whole lives are dependent on the grace of God and that all must be for the best for us? The words of Christian truth in themselves do not help us, the acknowledgment of Christian doctrine does not make us the blessed children of God, and self-accusations do not make us holy. It is the Spirit that we need; it is the Spirit only who can give us life; it is the Holy Spirit who teaches us to pray as well as to work, who awakens faith and kindles love, who must daily seal anew in our hearts the grace and truth of our God, and who then

gives strength and energy to our actions. He who thirsts for righteousness thirsts for the Holy Ghost, whether he knows and realises it or not. But we ought to know and realise it. We ought not to rest content with complaints of our own weakness; neither ought we to imagine that by all kinds of discipline and compulsion we can really help ourselves forward on that road to perfection in which we have been placed by Christ. The Lord, who has awakened in us a longing after perfect righteousness, has also promised that it shall be fulfilled; but not by the old way of the law, which did not lead to the goal, but by the new way that He has made for us; not without Him, but through Him; not in our own strength, which is pure weakness, but in His Spirit, which is the gift of His merciful love, and which has a power that can make us free.

Spirit,[1] intellect! what noble words these are in the speech of the world! It is only of a very few that it can be said that they are really intellectual or possessed of great talent, and it seems almost a part of the order of nature that most men should make no such pretensions or long for such gifts. So it is, too, with the Holy Ghost, who made His entry into the community of the faithful at the Feast of Pentecost. Many men seem to think that He was only sent many hundreds of years ago to prepare a few apostles and prophets for wonderful words and works, and then,

[1] *Geist* (like the compounds *geistreich* and *geistvoll*) cannot be translated by one word in English.

later on, now and again, to inspire an isolated hero of the faith that he might become a reformer of the Church. But the Holy Ghost was to be poured out on all flesh, and to be given to all who longed for righteousness and life. Man cannot preserve his natural life without the Spirit of God, who, since the creation, has preserved the life of all creatures, and ever begets it anew; no more can the Christian live the Christ-life in his own strength. The Holy Spirit who formed the disciples of Jesus into one community, still ever upholds that community, so that, in spite of the weakness of many of its members, it is nevertheless a tabernacle of God with men; the same Pentecostal Spirit upholds and alone supports the spiritual life of each individual Christian. Without that Spirit our whole life is either unchristian or no life at all. Without Him, as Paul says, we cannot even call Jesus Christ Lord in truth. That which is in us still of that Spirit who has worked in us since the day of our baptism, that it is which makes us long for Him, and invites us especially to-day to listen to His call: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me." It impels us, too, to-day to answer: "Lord, we thirst; we need that which Thou hast in full measure. We come to Thee according to Thy Word—give us to drink."

II.

Yes, to-day, when we hear His voice, let us open our hearts to Him. It is not the preacher's imagination which arbitrarily transfers the account of the Feast of Tabernacles to our Whitsuntide, and it is not the listeners' imagination which throws their thoughts back to that day, till it seems to them as though Jesus were really standing amongst us and inviting us to let Him quench the thirst of our souls from His Holy Spirit. He is verily and indeed standing in the midst of us, as John saw Him standing in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, which are a picture of His community on earth. And it is only now, when He is exalted unto heaven, that what He then said is fulfilled, and that He has become verily and indeed the life-giving Spirit to all who long for Him. Even when as Man He mixed with other men, our Lord spoke of Himself and invited men to Himself, as no man of sane mind before or after Him has ever spoken of himself or invited others to himself. And every one who treasures the faintest spark of Christian faith in his heart, feels certain that the good and lowly Jesus did not blaspheme presumptuously when He said of Himself what the God of the prophets had also said of Himself to His people, that He was the living source for all who thirsted. They believe that by these wonderful words, as by hundreds of other words of similar meaning, He imparted holy truth in tender love to His brethren.

Even then there was springing up in Him an inexhaustible well of holy life. The Spirit of God dwelt in Him and worked in Him, as He can only in the Holy One unquenched, undefiled, and unhindered. God had called a second creation into being when He sent His Son. He had thereby established a new birth for mankind. Jesus was verily in earnest when He invited thirsty souls to run no more to deceptive wells in which human skill had collected unwholesome water, but to come to Him who had something better to offer, and who had enough for all. They who came to Him and hung on His lips were already blessed. His words full of life and spirit begat new thoughts in them, and strengthened their holy resolutions. His unswerving trust in God worked with infectious power on His disciples; for His sake they plucked up courage to look to God as their Heavenly Father, and in love for Jesus they felt new love for God. Nevertheless, the Spirit was not yet in them as long as Jesus lived in the flesh. Their relationship to Him was essentially that of man to man, in spite of all the devotion on both sides; they were still separated by the insurmountable barriers in which the life of human beings is held and confined.

And do you not think that our Lord must have painfully experienced that which so many highly gifted human minds have felt and bemoaned, that it was impossible to find kindred spirits with whom to share His thoughts, fellow-workers who could be on an equality with Himself? It pained Him that He

could not see His strength mighty in His weak friends, that He must always remain so highly exalted above those whom He had stooped so low to serve in love. He longed for the hour when, freed from the shackles of human nature, He could pour forth the riches of His life and of His strength on the poor and weak. Even in Him this life and strength were fettered, as long as He lived on earth, by the bonds and limits of created life. Yea, the Evangelist is not afraid to use the bold words of our text: "The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus Christ was not yet glorified." The Spirit of God is indeed an eternal Spirit; we pray to Him with the Father and the Son, and when He dwells in our hearts, God dwells in us, and we live in God. But this eternal Spirit of God has come nearer to us, yea, He became another for us, when, in the holy Man Jesus, He found a vessel which allowed itself to be completely filled with Him. And, again, He came nearer to us, and became another in His efficacy for us men, when He completely filled this vessel and made it like unto Himself, and when He led the body of the crucified in transfigured form from the grave and bore Him up to heaven. Since then, only, has the well of living water, which was opened for the world in Jesus Christ, been ready to pour out its inexhaustible riches over all the thirsty land. Since then, only, has the new Holy Spirit come to earth to work there effectively, creating, upholding, and completing all that is good in the community of Christ. It is not our high or lowly, our wise or

foolish thoughts; it is not our real or pretended inspiration, the strength of our wills, our faith or love or hope, which forms us into a community and preserves us in communion with our invisible Head in heaven. It is His Spirit who has taken up His abode in our midst, and who has carried on His work in the unfathomable depths of our own being since the day of our baptism, who awakens in us whatever there may be of faith and love, of true thought and real inspiration.

This is a great mystery; who will deny it? Who can say that he has fathomed it, and can talk of it with the same feeling of certainty with which we speak of the perceptible objects of our daily experience? But, again, a great secret of the love of God and our salvation, which meets us at our Whitsun feast, has not been made known to us because of our doubting thoughts, but that we may praise the God of love who gives us more than we can ask or understand. This much at least we can understand, that we should no longer be able to believe in His love, if the invitation and offer of Jesus had proved to be a deception. We could not believe that God in His pitying love had sent His Son to us into the world, that we might have life in Him, when at the same time we were obliged to confess to ourselves that God had taken out of the world and had shut up in heaven the holy and immortal life which had come to light in Jesus Christ, and that here below as heretofore

men must come and go, live and die, sinful and unclean, weak and mortal; and that even those who had set their hopes on Christ were richer only in those claims and hopes which God had indeed awakened but which He had not fulfilled.

But it is the joy of the faithful community, on this day, that God has fulfilled that which He promised by sending His Son and by the mouth of His Son. The Lord Jesus, who when on earth was already a source of living Spirit, became a well of life-giving Spirit when He went to the Father and received power to impart His immortal life to the mortal and the dying. To-day He stands in the midst of His people and cries to the multitude: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink!" To-day, as then, this is much to ask of those who do not yet know Him personally, and have not as yet experienced any proofs of His love and power in themselves. Indeed, our Lord Himself does not conceal this. To show that it is not enough that those whom He thus invites to Himself should be in want and feel their want, He says: "Whosoever believeth on Me." Trust in Him is necessary, if we would come to Him. But Jesus expects that the thirsty will be willing to come to the well, that those in need of salvation will readily put their trust in Him. Now, in these days, wherever His invitation is clearly heard again, there is always some degree of faith in Him; there is some experience of His riches; there is already a

community which lives by His Spirit in so far as it lives at all. Therefore the only question is: Do any thirst? It is they who gladly hear His friendly invitation; it is they who are ready to believe that the Lord in heaven is rich unto all who call upon Him; and they, too, willingly allow themselves to be won by the promise of the Lord: "He that believeth in Me—out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

III.

First and last, it is always our own need, the poverty of our lives, the void in our hearts, the sluggishness of our wills, coldness of feeling, wandering thoughts and distraction of mind, which make us thirst for the Spirit of the Lord; and it is for peace and joy that we first pray when we draw near to the well of the Spirit, and with these the Holy Ghost can fill even the heart of an anchorite. But we are not anchorites, and the Spirit of Whitsuntide is a Spirit who loves fellowship and establishes fellowship. If, for a short space, He leads one and another into solitude, as He led Jesus after His baptism into the wilderness, He will lead them back again to fellowship with men, and to work with their fellows. The flesh separates more than it unites; the mind of the flesh is self-seeking; the desire of the flesh is enjoyment which breeds envy and strife. The Spirit, on the other hand, unites those who by self-seeking have been

estranged from one another. The Spirit of God lays hold of a man, drawing him out of the narrowness of his own being, leading him up to God, and towards all that comes down from God as a good gift, and destined for the good of all. The Spirit of God also opens the eyes of men, that they may once more realise the true nature and object of all these gifts and possessions, and never again imagine that they would be richer and happier if they could keep for themselves only that which God intended for all. They must seek their happiness and find it in fellowship with those whose possessions increase in love's exchange, and whose earthly task consists of work for the community. Thus the Holy Spirit of Whitsuntide heals and consecrates all communities in whose members He can find a place, in wedlock, in the family, in friendship and among fellow-labourers. Indeed, a state and nation, in which there are many children of God, will find to its own advantage that the Spirit of Jesus Christ is the Spirit of fellowship, of work for all, of self-sacrifice for the common good.

But there was *one* community which this Spirit did not find in existence, but called into being Himself—the community of the faithful, the Church of God. In her, above all, since that first Whitsuntide, the uniting power of the Holy Ghost has been preserved. As long as Jesus walked on earth with His apostles, they disputed amongst themselves

which of them was the greatest; they asked what the difference would be in the reward given to those who had followed Him from the first, and to those who had been converted later; they demanded the places of honour in heaven for themselves. After the day of Pentecost each one held the others in higher esteem than himself, and not only the apostles, but all the members of the rapidly increasing community were of one heart and of one soul: "Neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." But this did not refer only to earthly goods, but primarily to all those gifts which are summed up in the one gift of the Holy Ghost. They are given to us in order that we may hand them on, that we may make them fruitful for the community, that we may exchange them one with another, and by that exchange may increase our possessions. We should well be justified in admonishing all Christians so to act, as I said, that every one should stir up the gift that is in him, and prove by word and deed, each according to his ability, that he is a child of God. But more precious and more efficacious than exhortation, however well intended, is the word of promise which we have heard today from the lips of Jesus, and without faith in this word all exhortation giving evidence of the Spirit, would only cause misunderstanding. This Lord and Saviour who will give to drink, to all who are

thirsty and come to Him, from the well which is Himself, promises also that we shall become wells of living water to all who are around us. He has promised, and He will do it; and He does it really whenever any man, in faith on Him, makes room for His Spirit. The Spirit also who bears witness in our hearts that we are the children of God, and seals to us the grace and truth of God, causes our mouths also to overflow with that of which the heart is full, while He makes us His instruments. Yes, in this infirm and impure body in which we carry on our life, the Spirit of the holy God and of His Son will dwell and rule, so that His power will break forth in the glance of our eyes, in the words of our mouths, in the work of our hands. Thus our life here will be like a stream on the banks of which all will grow and flourish to the glory of God and the joy of men.

My beloved, there are men of whom this is a true likeness, and it is not only amongst the great in the kingdom of God, amongst the prophets and heroes, that they are to be found. The Pentecostal Spirit was poured out on all flesh wherever He was admitted. The servants and handmaidens also shall not only be the children of God but the instruments of His Spirit. Even a tiny well can send forth pure, clear water, and produce life and growth around it. This is promised to all who believe in Jesus, and, thirsting, come to Him that He may give them to drink of His Holy Spirit.

We cannot, in apparent modesty, renounce all claim on this great promise; for that would mean renouncing the Spirit Himself, without whom we are spiritually dead. And if, above all, we acknowledge our poverty of spirit, and that we have no power over those around us, we shall then become certain that we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, for we shall realise that our words and works are not mere patchwork of our own fashioning, but that they are the channels of the life-giving Spirit of Jesus Christ. Oh that we only had courage to believe the promise of the Lord! We should then experience so much more of the working of that Spirit who on the first Christian Whitsunday transformed all the members of the community into eloquent witnesses of His power. We need not fear pride, for the Holy Ghost dwells only with the lowly, and quickly forsakes the haughty. No one who possesses Him can boast of Him; He and His gifts cannot be bought; if He is not possessed, we can only pray for Him and accept the gift from the Lord, who says: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me." Amen.

XIII.

THE GOOD PHYSICIAN.

"*And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom; and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*"—MATT. *ix.* 9–13.

XIII.

THE GOOD PHYSICIAN.

ONE of the best known scenes in the Gospel story is here placed before our eyes, and the same picture, in all essentials, meets us more than once in the Gospels. On the one side stands Jesus, the Friend of publicans and sinners, and who sat at meat with them; and on the other side the Pharisees, who murmur and find fault with the Lord for so doing. On another day Jesus replied to the murmuring of the Pharisees by the three parables of the lost piece of silver, the lost sheep, and the lost son. The same opposition was manifested when Jesus sat at meat as the guest of Simon the Pharisee, and, to the astonishment of those who were eating with Him, allowed an abandoned woman to wash His feet with her tears, and to wipe them with her hair. To all sorts of people Jesus cried: "Follow Me." There were the honest fishermen by the Lake of Gennesaret; there was the faithful son who wanted first to go and bury his father, who had just died; and to-day it is a publican who is sitting at the receipt of custom at Capernaum. He is named Matthew, and

he is the Apostle whose name stands at the head of the Gospel from which our text is taken. The publican must not be missing from the inner circle of His disciples, from those whom Jesus invited to give up their former calling and become His fellow-workers. He was not only tolerated but even drawn by Jesus to Himself, and brought forward by Him that all might know why Jesus came into the world. If we ask in amazement how it was that a publican could immediately respond to such a call, and give up the whole course of his life, a satisfactory answer will occur to each of us. The publican Matthew, like many more of his order, must have heard Jesus preaching more than once, and possibly he may have even listened secretly to the preaching of John the Baptist. This powerful preaching had opened a new world to him, the very opposite of the world in which he had hitherto lived; a world of righteousness, of grace, and of peace. Hence sprang his implicit trust in the Man who offered Himself to him as a guide to a new life and a new life-work. He celebrates with a feast the hour in which Jesus made him a sharer in His own work. On the same day he invites many of his own class to a meal in his house. And as they feel drawn to Jesus, so Jesus also seems to feel at ease in their company. But what a company that was! Even those who know but little of the conditions of the Holy Land at that time, of the fearful pressure of taxation under which the

Jewish people had long groaned, of the habitual embezzlements and extortions of those who farmed out the taxes, and of the officials under them, can understand that publicans and sinners were almost interchangeable words. Jesus Himself did not speak of them in any other way. In fact, a want of all love for the Fatherland and a heartless love of gain must characterise an Israelite like Matthew or Zaccheus before he could become such a parasite, and thus suck the blood from the body of his own people. We cannot wonder that the Pharisees sneered and shook their heads, when they asked the disciples of Jesus: "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? He should not do so, if He intends to be a preacher of righteousness. He ought to avoid it, if He would be regarded as religious Himself." At a later time they went still further. They had not as yet said: "By the society that He chooses it is evident that He Himself is a sinner." But all their moral principles and inherited prejudices were roused by this sight, and an opposition to Jesus was now raised, which was not set at rest till Jesus hung upon the Cross as a transgressor of the law and a misleader of the people; and even then this opposition was not silenced.

But what has this to do with us, who are gathered together in the Name of the Reviled and Crucified One? When we look at this double picture, on the one side Jesus surrounded by

publicans and sinners, and, on the other, the Pharisees who murmured, we have no doubt on which side we ought to place ourselves. Our hearts, or at all events our Christian education, urges us at once to the side of the loving Master who parts with none of His majesty and purity by sitting at meat with degraded and erring people. And yet more than this: we place ourselves not only by the side of the publicans who are gathered round Jesus, we actually take their places. To-day, as on every Sunday in the service at the Altar, we have said with the publican in the Gospel, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and we turn away with horror from the Pharisee who stands opposite to him in his self-righteous pride and with his blasphemous prayer. But we may well doubt whether this means very much. It should make us pause to remember, that many who are quite unused to allow the sigh of the publican to pass their lips, are yet very ready to join in the judgment of condemnation on all Pharisaical doings, all spiritual pride, and all hypocritical piety. Again, is Jesus, as He verily lives before us in the Gospels, really what we need? Does the society, in which we once more see Him to-day, suit us? *We* generally choose other company for ourselves. And, lastly, can we all of us give a satisfactory answer to the question of the Pharisees: "*Why* eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" It seems as though the disciples of those

times were embarrassed by this question. Jesus Himself was obliged to give the answer in their stead. I imagine it would not be very different now, therefore I think it will do us all no harm, if during this hour we consider seriously the answer which was given by our Lord Jesus Christ. He first replied with the proverb: "*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*" This is indisputably true, but in the proverb, which is disputed by none, the answer is to be found, which is by no means so plain to all. Jesus says by it: "*I am a Physician; therefore the sick seek Me, and I visit the sick. But because I am a Physician, the whole have no part in Me.*"

I.

The whole need not a physician. Are there any men, then, who are whole? Jesus did not directly deny it. The publicans and sinners were sick people—sick in soul, sick in honour, sick in conscience. The Pharisees were whole in comparison with them. They had remained true to their nationality, they lived correctly according to the law of their fathers, they were held in honour by their nation as the guardians and teachers of the law. If they were of different minds amongst themselves on religious and moral questions, still they had and knew the law, and were well versed in expounding it. They had had great teachers,

whose decisions were accounted by them as a Gospel. They would also gladly have recognised a new Master, who in their own way, only more clearly and more intelligently than their former masters, would comment on the Word of God and teach the true wisdom of life. But they had no need of a physician who said, *I am a Physician*, because they did not feel ill.

Are there any amongst us who are not ill? Why, in the great company of those who have been baptized in the name of Christ, we find many people like the Pharisees, who are unable to accept Jesus and to desire a closer relationship to Him, just because Jesus is a Physician and they feel well. The Gospel is a medicine: to one it tastes bitter, to another nauseously sweet. Who cares to take medicine when he feels perfectly well? A draught of fresh water from a natural or an artificial well, or a glass of wine at a joyful feast, tastes better and does more good to a man who is whole. It may seem unnecessary to speak of such healthy people in church; they do not hear, for they do not come to church. Certainly every one of us is ready to assent to the words of the Apostle: "What have I to do to judge those also that are without?" We may not judge those who turn away from our Physician and His medicine; we may, indeed, judge no man, for then we should be Pharisees. Neither ought we to be indifferent to them. They are our brethren, our fellow-citizens, our fellow-

workers; they are, perhaps, our personal friends and nearest relatives. There are people amongst them, too, who really give us the impression of perfect health. They accomplish great things, and in many ways their work is beneficial. They are held in honour, and not without cause; some amongst them are the darlings of their nation, and we have been accustomed to admire them from our youth up. How can we remain unmoved when such eminent persons, after living in our midst, end their days amongst us without drawing near to the Lord, who is our Physician? In no other respect is there any impassable gulf between us and them. They have been baptized as we have, and we are men like them. Only a movable barrier seems to separate us. How often we see one who has been brought up in Church ways, and who has really possessed religious faith, gradually glide across, or even suddenly fall away to the side of those who imagine that they can get on without Jesus the Physician. A religious boy grows into a man of the world; his parents were religious, but before they closed their eyes, the last thread was broken which had hitherto linked the son to the community of Christ. Who can deny that the great reputation of those healthy and strong master-minds has much to do with these sorrowful developments? There many princes in the realm of intellect may be seen, here not a few publicans and sinners. I believe that it matters much to us what the

healthy people on that side think and say of the Physician and His medicine. One of them once said: "Whoever possesses art and science possesses religion also; let him who has neither have religion." During their life they do not intend to dispense with that superiority to all that is trivial and transitory, which is preserved for other men by their faith; they want to have a kind of religion. But the true religion, the revelation of God in His Son Jesus Christ, does not suit them; for He is a Physician, and they are whole. So they search for and provide some substitute or other for themselves, leaving religion for those who are less gifted, and who do not possess or know anything about art or science.

Others go still farther. They join in the well-meant words, "Religion must be preserved for the people," and by people they do not understand the nation to which they are proud to belong, but the mass of the uneducated, who earn their bread in the sweat of their brow. They consider that the latter could not get on without religion, for without it they would become rough and rude, discontented and violent. They look upon religion as useful in disciplining the turbulent masses. Since we have possessed colonies, we have sometimes heard such people speaking, by way of exception, in a friendly manner of missions to the heathen, whereas formerly they would only have mocked at them. The Roman Catholic missionaries are especially praised, because

they are more speedy in attaining their object. Christianity is good for the negro, because it teaches him discipline and order, work and cleanliness. We Germans, however, who have passed through the children's school of Christianity a thousand years ago or more, need not be perpetually passing through it. At all events, the educated members of the nation do not need the Gospel any more, for they are strong enough for the battle of life without it. Some are ready to allow that, in spite of the most highly developed culture, there are some temperaments that absolutely need the consolation of the Gospel, and that to them nothing can replace it. They do not object to their wives being religious and practising devotion. They themselves stand afar off; they do not feel any need, for they feel they are whole. Now, how are we to reply to all this? Are we to prove to such people that they are sick, and that our whole nation is sick, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot? Are we to force ourselves upon them, and show them that their imaginary health does not exist, and that they are sadly in need of the Physician? That would not be like unto the Master. Jesus did not say to the Pharisees, "Come unto Me," but He said, "Go your way." Neither did He say: "Come and learn to know Me better," but: "Go and learn what is written in your Bible: 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice.'" If ye were compassionate, ye would not look down so contemptuously on degraded and inferior people, and so askance at those

who take an interest in them; ye would not find the distance so great between them and yourselves, but would acknowledge them as your equals in all the essentials which make up the misery and the dignity of man. Go and learn better what ye yourselves acknowledge as the chief command of your God, the law of love. Then prove yourselves, and thus learn to know yourselves.

Perhaps the day will come when ye will find yourselves destitute of love, and therefore destitute of all true life, when ye will feel sick in the innermost centre of your being. Remember then that there is a Physician who heals all diseases.

Jesus still speaks thus to those who are whole, and who turn their backs upon Him; and He can scarcely speak in any other way to many of those who confess Him. The same people that He calls the whole in parabolic sayings, He calls the righteous when using no figure. But when we ask where righteous people are now to be found, we shall not exactly look for them outside our own circle, but first of all amongst those who still adhere to the Church, the Word of God, and the Altar. And there also they are really to be found. There are plenty of Pharisees amongst those who call themselves the disciples of Jesus. We can prove this at once by noticing how seldom a joyful spirit is to be seen in those who are well-disposed towards the Church, and who conscientiously fulfil their religious duties. The company gathered round the table in the house of Matthew was in a joyful,

festive mood, and this also was considered a cause of offence. On the same day, the disciples of John, the preacher of repentance, came to Jesus and asked Him: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not?" And Jesus answered: "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn when the bridegroom is with them?" There is a time for fasting, and there is a time for sorrow, but he who sits at meat with Jesus is celebrating a wedding, and cannot be sorrowful again immediately. Such a man will go away from the Lord's Table, and from the House of God, to his own home, his face beaming with joy. How comes it to pass that we see so little of this joyfulness in so many Christians? They may be righteous, but so were the Pharisees.

If we are righteous we must also offer sacrifices. We, as Evangelical Christians, acknowledge as such only works of love, and the sacrifice of the praise of our lips. Such sacrifices are well pleasing to God, and we rejoice that they are to be found in our midst. For example, it is meet and right that we should offer our confession of Apostolic faith as a sacrifice of praise to God every Sunday, but we must also allow those words to be said to us: "I have more pleasure in mercy than in sacrifice." Confession of faith may be so made that it sounds as though it were meritorious to be able to believe and to dare to confess. A sacrifice of praise, beginning quite rightly with the words, "I thank Thee, O God," may end in words which are an abomination in the sight of God

and of man. The prayer of the Pharisee in the Temple was of this nature. All who confess Christ and all who worship in the House of God must therefore take to heart the words of the Lord: "I have more pleasure in mercy than in sacrifice." In these days, those words are emphasised by many Christians, while they even reproach our Church with attending so exclusively to doctrine, confession, and public worship, that she fails in active sympathy with the needs of the community and neglects her social tasks. There may have been times when there was some truth in this complaint, but in our century the revival of Home as well as of Foreign Missions is a real proof that Evangelical Christianity is mindful again of these words. For a long time past there has been no lack of opportunities for offering to God sacrifices which are also works of compassionate love. But the way in which, in a certain quarter, the Church is invited to attend to her social tasks tends to obscure the Gospel. Jesus did not say that He came to make the world better, to create a better order of things in the State and in society, and to put an end to the ancient strife between mine and thine to the satisfaction of all, but He said He was a Physician. A physician must always treat separately the individuals who need His help in sickness; those who feel called to take part with the followers of Jesus in His work, must strive to be like Him in thought and in their treatment of men, instead of carrying out their own wise or foolish thoughts. They

must, first of all, realise that the root of all the evil in the world is to be found in the sickness of the human heart, and that, in all their efforts to heal, they are only bungling, if they do not attack the seat of the disease. But they only can realise this, and act in accordance with it, who have studied the universal sickness in themselves, and have found the true seat of the disease in their own lives, and have experienced something at least of the healing power of the great Physician.

II.

We have seen that there are many and divers kinds of men who are whole, who have no part in Jesus, and who must be left to themselves by Him for the present. But there are plenty of others who are sick and who are being treated by this Physician. They think much of Him, and will one day know that they have to thank Him for everything. Are we sick folk like them? Nothing was taught us so early, and nothing has been impressed upon us so often, as the fact that we are sinners, and that all evil proceeds from our sin and that of our fellow-men. But on whom does it still make any impression? To how many has it become insipid food? There are many, at all events, who do not find it any help: they remain as they were, to-day happy, to-morrow sad; to-day content with the world and with themselves, to-

morrow discontented with everything; to-day crushed down by despair, and to-morrow as haughty as the Pharisees. Perhaps we have not yet heard the true preacher of repentance; it was not Moses with his Law, nor John the Baptist with his words of thunder, but it was Jesus who said: "I am come to call sinners to repentance." He even preaches repentance without speaking; He preaches repentance by His mere presence, by His holy face, His faultless life, His unselfish love for mankind, by the peace of God which is poured out over His whole Being. Even the heathen said, "Behold the man," or "Certainly this is a righteous man," and down to the present day the enemies of the Gospel have never succeeded in blackening this radiant human form. It still shines in the midst of history, and in the midst of the present world, and all the greater and lesser lights of humanity pale before it, even before "the breath of death breathes upon them" or the strong wind of this world's judgment extinguishes them. All the differences between the more or less good disappear in the light of this holy human life. Together with Him may be found the true Israelite without guile like Nathanael, and the prodigal son of the same nation, busy Martha and thoughtful Mary, and the woman who was a great sinner. It is difficult to regard all such differences as insignificant; it is painful to be obliged to confess to ourselves, that had our education and position in life been different we might not have been safe

from the deepest abyss into which we have seen others fall. But truth will have it so. The man who with a single and upright heart gazes upon the holy Man Jesus, feels pricked to the heart, and is forced at last to confess: "Thou only, O Lord, art true Man, as God would have Him be; we are all only caricatures of men. Thou only art pure; we are all impure. Thou only art whole; we are all sick." There is no question of a little more strength or weakness, of perfection or imperfection; but it is a question of health that longs for eternal life, and of sickness which leads to death.

A man who allows himself to be thus called to repentance by Jesus has already found out to some extent that He who only is whole is also the Physician of all who are sick. He will soon learn more, for all that Jesus says and does bears witness to him that the good pleasure of God which rests on Jesus, and the love of God in which He lives and moves, do not concern him only, but all who allow themselves to be called to repentance by Jesus. The love of God for His Son is already grace for the sinners who cling to Him, and who, taking His hand appear before the Eternal Father. There is forgiveness of sins. The Son of God came that man might be enabled to believe; therefore the Pure One did not shun, but sought the society of the impure; therefore He sat at meat with the publicans who had taken to heart His call to repentance. In communion with Him they have

forgiveness of sins. This is balm for the wounds of the broken heart, this is the return of health; here the joyful sense of recovery from severe sickness makes itself felt; here also is thankful love for the Physician who has given His help.

But what am I speaking of? Of things that happened eighteen or nineteen hundred years ago, or of things that we now experience? It seems as though one of us ought to come forward and bear witness: "It is still so to-day, I have experienced it." It seems as though one Christian ought to tell another how sick he was, and how he experienced the help of the Physician. But who will do it? who will dare to venture? These are very delicate matters. It would be neither beneficial nor desirable for all if one were to reveal the depths of the life he led without His God and Saviour, or the secrets of his return to God, in the presence of the community. The latter could not be done truthfully without the former. But still worse would it be for one of us to be ashamed of that which alone has saved our honour. Yea, it would indeed be disgraceful for one who preaches the Gospel to be ashamed of the Gospel. The man who preaches in sincerity, and the man who hears in unfeigned faith alike confess: "We belong to the sick who need the Physician; we know only *One* who is whole, even Jesus Christ, and He is our Physician." We also know by experience that health streams forth from Him in the call to repentance, in the forgiveness

of sins, and in the power of sanctification. Do not let us allow ourselves to be led astray by the hateful scars that we perceive on ourselves and our fellow-Christians, nor by the slowness of recovery and the constant return of the old sickness. All these things only remind us that we need the Physician, as long as we remain in the great infirmary of this world. Therefore let us hold fast to the tried Physician, whose skilful and tender hand, whose patience and faithfulness have been tried by us. We will not let Him go, neither will He let us go, till we are quite whole. Amen.

XIV.

TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS.

"*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily, I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*"—MATT. v. 20–26.

XIV.

TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS.

OUR Lord and Master places two alternatives before us in our text, and we have to choose between them as long as we tread the path of this life. The one alternative is the Kingdom of Heaven, and its gates only open to true and genuine righteousness. The other alternative is a prison, from which there is no release, because no one can pay the debt which brought him to this prison. But is it necessary to preach of such things in a Christian community? That there is a heaven for the good and pious and a hell for the wicked and godless, are among the first things our children learn; and grown persons prove, by coming to church, that they have not forgotten and do not wish to forget these elementary truths. We might think that such things should be preached out of doors, in the streets, the taverns, the railway-carriages, perhaps also in studies where no Bible is to be found; we might think that the terrors of hell should be dwelt upon and the way to heaven pointed out to the careless and unbelieving who do not care about heaven and hell, but not to the people who come here to the House of God, and gather together

in the Name of Jesus for believing prayer and devout meditation on His Word. Our Lord Christ thought differently. He spake these words to His faithful disciples. In the whole glorious Sermon on the Mount, of which our text forms a part, it was the Twelve Apostles, whom He had just chosen, that He was teaching. All who were present might listen, but it was addressed to His enthusiastic followers. It was to those whom He had called blessed, of whom He had spoken as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and whom He had pointed out as the children of His Heavenly Father, that these solemn words were addressed: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven;" and it was they whom He warned against the guilt which leads to the eternal prison.

The disciples and confessors of Jesus need such a warning, and they only really understand it. Therefore we will not refuse to listen to what these words have to say to us to-day, if we really wish to be His disciples. No one will *become* a disciple merely by hearing the *sermon* of our Lord which is our subject for to-day. It is only by the operation of the Gospel, working in us contrite confession of our natural corruption, and leading us to grasp trustfully the hand of God's grace, stretched out to save us from destruction, that any of us can become the disciple of Jesus. The first and immediate hearers of the Sermon on the Mount were thus minded before they heard it, and

they had also lived for some time under the powerful influence of the wonderful Master, in whose mouth old truths sounded like a new discovery, whose new doctrine foretold a reversal of the order of the world, as it had hitherto been conducted, and who sealed His words by deeds, which in themselves looked like a beginning of a new order of things. It was a life differing from that of the righteous under the guidance of the Scribes and Pharisees. Those who were thus allowed to accompany our Lord on His wanderings, as faithful disciples, lived in a higher sphere, a world full of grace and truth, full of joy and hope, full of delight in freedom and a sense of power. They felt released from the petty rules of the Scribes and the tormenting anxiety of the Pharisees. Where God does such wonders, and allows them to be proclaimed, it seems as though such severe duty, such hard work, and such strict rules were no longer necessary for man. But the King of the Kingdom of Heaven, who holds in His hands the keys of heaven and of hell, raises His voice in warning, and says: "Think not that I am come to set aside the requirements of God on man's will and works. Do not imagine that your religious enthusiasm will bear you as on wings to the Kingdom of Heaven. Ye are still in the path of duty, of work, of obedience or disobedience to God's holy will, and it is still uncertain how it will be with you at the end of the road. Only the righteous will live; only he who does the will of God will abide for all eternity." Jesus did not require less of His disciples, but much

more than other teachers of morals. He required a righteousness which should exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.

During this hour let us meditate on the righteousness without which we can have no part in the Kingdom of Heaven, that we may all the more earnestly strive after it in our daily life! In our text, the Lord does not at once describe it in all its details; the whole Sermon on the Mount is occupied with this subject. Here, He first shows by the one command, "Thou shalt not kill," how He means the will of God to be done, on the doing of which our salvation depends. And here at once, at the very beginning, the essence of this righteousness and the manner in which it differs from that which only resembles it, comes clearly to light.

The righteousness without which none of us can have any part in the eternal Kingdom of God is—

First: *Not the piety which is sufficient of itself alone, but a love of mankind which proceeds from it.*

Secondly: *This righteousness does not consist in the fulfilment of this or that commandment, but in giving up the heart to the will of God, whose whole law rests upon the command of love.*

I.

Jesus did not find in the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees the righteousness which He required of His disciples. Better and very different

in kind from theirs is the righteousness that will be required at the gates of heaven. We must remember what kind of people the Scribes and Pharisees were who so often meet us in the Gospel. We find the Lord generally in antagonism to them; they often attacked Him ruthlessly, and He often rebuked them ruthlessly. It is no wonder that neither Scribe nor Pharisee is a name that sounds well in Christian ears. But we must not forget that it was a Scribe to whom Jesus once said, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God," and that it was a youth of a truly Pharisaical disposition that He once looked upon lovingly, as we are told in the Gospel of Mark, and to whom He said that he only lacked one thing. If the latter, like the former, did not take the last decisive step, there were others from their circles who did. We see the Pharisee Nicodemus advancing step by step in adoration of Jesus, and in courage to confess Him. Paul also from a Pharisee became a great Apostle; and as a Christian he not only repented of the guilt he had incurred as a Pharisee and a persecutor of the Christian community, but he avowed also when a Christian, "I am a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee," and he rejoiced that from his youth he had served God with a clear conscience. The Scribes were the theologians of the Jewish people at that time, the teachers of religion in the synagogues and in the lecture-halls both of the higher and elementary schools. They

searched the Scriptures with unwearied diligence, and, in their way, held them in high esteem. But the Pharisees formed the wider circle of those who strove to carry out the teaching of the Scribes in daily life. Their whole lives were to be fashioned by the Law. They wished to keep themselves unspotted by the abominations of heathenish customs and immorality, which for centuries past had tried to force their way among the Jewish people. They were exact in the performance of all their religious duties, in their visits to the Temple and the synagogue, in the offering of sacrifices, in fasting and prayer, in keeping the Sabbath holy, and in the observance of the hours of prayer. The letter of the Law was to become life, and all the customs and institutions that had been developed, by the wisdom of their forefathers, were to be fostered as a bulwark of legal righteousness. In short, the Pharisees were more righteous than all others, and their pious zeal was handed down in their circles as the best family possession. They judged others severely, but nevertheless it was not only the lost sons of their people that they thus judged, but the first-born also, who had remained outwardly in the Father's House, the priests and high-priests, who were worldly, and did not walk worthily of their calling. In troublous times these Pharisees had proved more than once that they were not only righteous in word, but also in deed, yea, that they were men ready to give their lives for

the honour of their God and the sanctity of His Law.

But one thing was lacking in them, and that was just the chief part of the Law—love, love which flows forth of itself from true piety. They strove after righteousness, they sought it, and they imagined that they had found it, by joining in the public worship of God with fervour, and by fashioning their lives exactly in accordance with the principles of the faith; in short, in a piety which is sufficient unto itself. Therefore Jesus said to His disciples: "If your righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." Therefore He says to the conscience of every one: "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

Whoever goes to the altar of God, seeks first of all the presence of God, that he may thank Him for His goodness, and pray to Him for His grace; that he may make his peace with God, when he has been troubled by sin, in order that in God his soul may regain its serenity, of which the restlessness of the world had robbed it. It is also quite true that in the public worship of God, and even in common prayer, each individual has to do with his God and with Him alone. It is well that we should not allow the eyes of the mind to wander

hither and thither during Divine service, but should collect our thoughts and fix them on God only. But he greatly deceives himself who imagines that with no love in his heart for his fellow-men, he may appear in the assembled congregation before that God who Himself is Love. He deceives himself who imagines that when through his own fault he is living at variance with his neighbour, he can find peace for his soul in the God of peace and mercy. All such worship of God is vain, a very abomination to God, and the piety which finds satisfaction in such services is not righteousness and does not make for righteousness. The House of Prayer is transformed for such a man into a judgment hall, and the mercy-seat into the tribunal of a severe judge, who condemns the hypocrite and delivers him over to the prison, and who only receives into His kingdom of glory the souls which draw near to the altar in sincere love to God and the brethren. So the Lord taught His disciples, and so He speaks to us also. After all, there was nothing really new in what Jesus said. Truth is eternal, and has never been without witnesses. Even the prophets of the Old Covenant bore witness against those who imagined they could find righteousness in the constant worship of God. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me?" said the Lord by Isaiah. "Who hath required this at your hand to tread My courts?" And when, conscious of their guilt, the people sought out new

services and unheard-of sacrifices, whereby they might appease an angry God, the Prophet Micah replied: "It hath been told thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requireth of thee, namely, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

The Pharisees were also acquainted with these words of God, and held them sacred like all else that was written in their Bible; and yet, when the true Scribe and the truly righteous Man bore witness, in the spirit of the old Prophets, against the hypocritical righteousness of the religious men of His time, it sounded like a new revelation. Men may grasp outwardly the deepest and most spiritual truths, while at the same time they elude their inward power. The Pharisees said that to practise love was to give alms; to keep God's Word meant knowing the Commandments, and guarding against every transgression of their literal sense. This may be done heartlessly and unlovingly, and yet the semblance of righteousness be complete. We, as Christians, hear the witness of Christ, which is greater than that of the old prophets. Do you imagine that we are therefore safe from the hypocritical righteousness of the Pharisees? We appear before God's altar whenever we go to church. On that altar we offer the sacrifice of our prayers and our confession to God. The only question is, With what thoughts do we go there? We can scarcely accuse ourselves of having been so much occupied with ourselves and

our God, on our way to church, that we were not able to think of our fellow-men and our relations with them. In general we think quite enough about other people. We meet them on the way to church, we see each other in church. We even take off our hats to those with whom we are not on the best of terms. The question is, What are the thoughts which then fill our hearts? I am afraid that we think ten times oftener of all that we have against others, of our accusations and our complaints against them, than we think of all that they have against us. If we would but think in the right way of what we have against others, of their faults in general, or of the injury they may have done us!

We celebrate no Divine service without the Lord's Prayer, and we never have the Lord's Prayer without the petition: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." We cannot say these words without lying, and we cannot go to church without hypocrisy, if every thought of the faults and injustice of our neighbours has not been at once accompanied by the other thought: "I am not the judge, neither will I be the accuser of my brother before God. He has enough to bear in his own guilt, as I have in mine. I forgive him willingly, as truly as I pray to God that He will cast all my sins into the sea of His forgiving mercy." This is so self-evident that we say it as a matter of course in

the Lord's Prayer. And yet, while on his way to church, one Christian will bear a grudge against another, and will keep count of his slips; and yet he is wishing to be religious and imagining that he is righteous. Such service of God is vain; such piety is hypocrisy; such righteousness is unreal, because love is lacking. Love, without which no piety or righteousness can exist, is not long in answering the question: "What have I against my neighbour?" It first asks: "What has he against me? What complaint has he to make against me? What can I do to gain a feeling of love and confidence in him?" If at any time such thoughts ought to be ours, surely they would be most fitting on our way to church. If such a thought arises in any man's mind, and he drives it away again, then the Lord meets him, and says: "It were better to return to thy house than to desecrate My House! It were better to be silent, or to talk of all kinds of vanity, than to stain thy lips with hypocritical praise and prayer. Perhaps he who, through thy fault, is estranged from thee, has already forgiven thee in his heart; perhaps he is silent to thee and prays for thee. Thou findest the way too long to go to him and to say to him, 'Forgive me,' and yet thou findest the way to God so short and easy. But God holds Himself afar from hypocrites; He is only near to those who call upon Him in sincerity and truth, with hearts full of love and the need of

love." These words of our Lord before which we arraign ourselves to-day have not been without influence on Christian practice. The practice has not yet died out amongst religious people of examining and questioning themselves, before going to the Altar to receive the Holy Communion, whether they have done a wrong to any one. Would it not be well if, sometimes during these days of confession and preparation for the Lord's Supper, we were to go to others and ask for their forgiveness? And yet where pious practices and habits are inherited in families and in wider circles, the danger of Pharisaical hypocrisy lies close at hand. We must, therefore, ask ourselves at all times, whether we are acting like those who knew and confessed the holiest commandments, but who managed to come to terms with themselves by outward actions and a dead formula, while their hearts remained far from the brother who should to be reconciled, from the God whom they strove to serve, and from the will of God, which outwardly they appeared to fulfil.

II.

The righteousness without which none of us can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, is not an outward fulfilment of this or that commandment of God, or of Christ, but the surrender of the heart to the will of God, who is Love and who requires love. The Lord

teaches us this in the first half of our Gospel. In the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," He shows what a very different kind of righteousness His disciples must have from the righteousness taught by the Scribes and practised by the Pharisees. The Scribes enjoined this commandment, like all the others, on the people, and, in order to make it all the more forcible, they drew attention to the punishment for murder and manslaughter, appointed by the civil judicial authorities. With reference to the commandment itself, they allowed themselves to be satisfied with asserting what was *forbidden* by God in it, while they neglected to inquire and find out what God really *commanded;* what conduct was righteous and well pleasing to God, and what God required of all His people when He forbade murder. Therefore, as there are never more than a few men who are tempted to take the lives of their neighbours by violence, this commandment very soon became inoperative for the community of the righteous. And indeed, when thus explained, all the Ten Commandments only serve to increase the pride of respectable people, who have not become murderers, adulterers, and thieves, and who may imagine, therefore, that they are upright, and have done all that God commands, and are well pleasing to God when they appear before His Altar.

This delusion, so deadly to souls, was destroyed by the Lord, when He said: "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment." The Lawgiver and Judge in heaven does

not let His eye rest on anything external. It may deceive men, but He looks on the heart where the passions rise, and from whence the thoughts proceed as words and deeds. And the true Interpreter of the Law of God here proclaims that it is the will and judgment of His Father, that anger, aroused in a loveless heart against a brother, is one and the same as an act of murder. It is true, indeed, that as we listen to the Lord, as He goes on speaking of the man who calls his brother "Raca," and of that other who says to him, "Thou fool," it almost seems as though the Lord were Himself just such a Scribe of these times, just such a subtle Rabbi, as those whom He denounced for their teaching, which so misrepresented the Word of God. For what difference does it make whether a man suppresses his resentment, or attacks another with harsh words, or uses some insulting expression in giving vent to his anger? Or can it be the meaning of Jesus, that he only is deserving of the anger and punishment of God who says, "Thou fool," while a second man who uses some other insulting word, or a third who reveals his contempt by a silent scornful glance, will only come under the judgment of man? Our Lord was certainly a Scribe, but not like those who cavilled at the Word of God, splitting hairs, and thereby destroying its essence and its power. The people of Galilee were well able to understand Him; they were convicted and their hearts were touched by His words, and they judged that He spake with power and not as the Scribes.

Jesus spoke more than once, using the formulas of the learned Scribes of that day; but He did so only to destroy such formulas by the power of the truth which flowed forth from His heart, which He recognised in every word of His God and Father, and which He allowed to stream forth in irresistible power into the hearts and consciences of those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness. Souls like these understood Him naturally, even when in epigrammatic riddles, or in dark similitudes, or in bold examples, He proclaimed the truth which God hides from the wise and prudent, but reveals to the simple-hearted, the sincere, and the longing. The specious hypocrite asks: "What can I allow myself to do in the presence of God's law? How far may I follow my heart's desires, without ceasing to be righteous, and to be accounted as such?" Whoever longs for true righteousness and for God Himself, asks: "What will He who sees the heart have me to do?" Such a hearer of the sermon on true righteousness recognises at once, in the outward act which the Law condemns, the heart's desire, which under certain circumstances would lead on to the horrible deed. He knows that a man, in a corner of his heart, may cherish thoughts that may be more loveless and murderous than those of many a man-slayer have been; and that hatred can spirt out more poison in one word than a passionate man may have in his heart when he seizes the knife. If we could bring thoughts to judgment, if we could weigh and test the amount of hatred in words, we

should find many murderers amongst those who wish to be religious. For he who does not love his brother, hates him, and he who hates him is a murderer.

Our righteousness must be better than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, better than that of many Scribes and many righteous men of to-day. This means that first of all it must be true; then it will become perfect. To whom much is given, of him will much be required; to us Christians, much has been given, infinitely more than the Law which was given by Moses to the people of God; to us is given grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. And how much have we who cling to Christ's community, and so often hear the Word of Christ; how much more have we than those who have given it all up! We cannot say that we do not know what the righteousness is that God requires of us. His truth has been made known to us, and His mercy has been proclaimed to us. God requires nothing of us for which He will not willingly and richly give the strength to those who call on Him as their Heavenly Father in the Name of His Son. He does not require this or that service or virtue; He does not demand heroic deeds, such as only a few can succeed in accomplishing. He requires only one thing—that we give up our fruitlesss efforts to deceive Him, and in exchange surrender ourselves to His will in single-heartedness.

If we are still terrified by the words, "Whosoever

shall say to his brother, 'Thou fool,' shall be in danger of hell-fire," if we acknowledge that we too ought to be called murderers, if even unholy anger makes a man a murderer, do not let us evade the truth because it gives us pain, but thank God that He judges us in this life. And if at any time our consciences cause us serious anxiety, because of our want of love, let us think of the actual murderer who hung on the cross at Golgotha beside the Lord. He acknowledged the righteousness of the judgment of God, and his own unrighteousness in that mirror of innocence, the Saviour crucified beside him. Other men may ask in doubt if the righteousness of this robber were better than the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. The Holy King of the Kingdom of Heaven found the righteousness in this robber, without which none can enter into the Kingdom of God, and He opened the gates of Paradise for him. Whoever is satisfied with a religion without love, and a righteousness without resignation of the heart to the holy and gracious will of God, will not come to life. Blessed are they, on the contrary, who hunger and thirst after righteousness; they do not hunger and thirst in vain; they shall be satisfied. Amen.

XV.

"HE DOETH ALL THINGS WELL."

"*And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man: but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it; And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.*"—*Mark vii.* 31–37.

XV

"HE DOETH ALL THINGS WELL."[1]

THE lesson of this Gospel is taught us in a similar way in many other Gospels. How often during the Christian Year Christian congregations see the Form of the worker of miracles pass before them, that wonderful Form of the Man endowed by God with strength and power as no other man ever was, so that even without His intention, on His journeyings to and fro, He permitted health and strength to stream forth from Him to the suffering who desired His help. One day He gives hearing and speech to a deaf and dumb man. On another occasion He gives sight to the blind, then again He gives strength to the palsied and lame, so that they are enabled to walk about vigorously, and even to carry the beds on which they had formerly been carried because of their helplessness. We are also taken to death-beds, to biers, and even to graves that are closed, and we see the dead come to life again at His Word. How can this help us? What is the meaning of it to us in this our world of to-day, when we see others who are born

[1] This sermon was preached in the forest of Ahlbeck, a watering-place on the Baltic.

blind and dumb remain so, in spite of the science of the physicians, and in spite of all the love of those to whose care they are confided. What is its meaning to us when we hear: "Eighteen or nineteen hundred years ago, there was a man in the far East who knew how to help when the art of man and the love of man could do no more, and their weak hands fell helpless to their sides, while hundreds praised Him as their Saviour from hopeless distress." "Once upon a time there was a man," so begins many a fairy tale, and the East is the home of many a fairy tale. Are they only fairy tales that are told us about our Lord Christ? If I thought so, I would not preach to you. You need a portion of the Bread of Life on Sunday, and had I only a stone in my hand in the Gospel for to-day, how could I offer it to you? And even if I knew how to cut and polish it, so that it would sparkle in the sun, it would still be a stone, hard, and unfit for the food of souls that hunger. I only preach to you because I know and believe that these stories of the wonderful works of Jesus are also essential parts of the Gospel, which will so satisfy us in this life that we shall live for eternity. It is true that to hear accounts of such deeds is not the same as ourselves to see and experience them. But whoever has experienced anything of the power of the consolation and sanctification which, flowing forth from Christ unabated by the course of time, refresh and renew his heart, knows also that the Gospel is no fairy tale, but the power of God which saves and

sanctifies. Now this Gospel has never existed apart from the proclamation of these wonderful works of Jesus; and their proclamation is part of the power of the Gospel, for they are deeds of lasting importance and efficacy. If I were deaf and dumb and were to remain so till my death, if I were ill with no hope of recovery, if age had so broken down my strength that I had nothing more to hope for on earth but a blessed death, still these works of my Lord would not be lost to me, nay, I might be only the more susceptible to their influence.

What was their efficacy when they took place? They surely did not affect the sufferers alone to whom Jesus gave health. In the Gospel for to-day we hear nothing more of the deaf and dumb man whom Jesus healed. We do not know whether he became a disciple of Jesus, or whether he belonged afterwards to the community of the faithful. On the other hand, we hear of the mighty effect on the mass of people who saw the miracle, and on those afar off who heard of it. Though in many cases the impression of this and of many of the other miracles of Jesus may have been obliterated, yet not in all. Had it been so, the account of these deeds could not have reached us, and there would have been no community to be edified by their publication. The first witnesses of Christ's miracles received an impression such as we Christians of to-day ought also to receive. "They were astonished beyond measure, saying, He hath done all things well; He maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak."

These people do not seem to have gained very much from the deed of Jesus at the first moment. They only acknowledged what was known to many and what was doubted by scarcely any one. The event of that day reminded them of the similar acts of Jesus which they had seen and of which they had been told. They were amazed at such unheard-of power, and at the wonderful skill of the Man. Nothing was too hard for Him, nothing impossible. He succeeded in all that He undertook; all that He did was well done. A crowd will often be thus enthusiastic about the skill of a man, even though it be of the most ignoble and useless nature. Many are often enthusiastic about a man whose name is even cursed by others, because he has used his skill for the destruction of many. But it was very different with Jesus. Jesus never injured any man by His wonderful power; He only did good, ever helping, healing, saving; never beating, wounding, and killing, not even when every just judge would have held that it was a righteous punishment. Moreover, the people saw how He went about His work, how He looked up to heaven, sighed, and prayed to His Heavenly Father, and how then, in the strength of the prayer that had been heard, He cried to the deaf ear: "Be opened." In spite of all their folly, the multitude acknowledged: "It is God who by Jesus does such great things and who does all things well." They gave glory to God by thus praising Jesus. They had also heard Him preach of the kingdom of God, in which there

should be no more sin nor suffering, no sickness nor death. They saw this kingdom already coming in the mighty works of Jesus which He performed on the deaf, the dumb, the blind, and the lame. How could those help being enthusiastic who had lived to see such things? Who could sigh over sickness and bodily infirmity when in company with Him who willingly and untiringly healed all infirmities? Who could be anxious about daily bread when in company with Him who could satisfy thousands with a few loaves? Who could fear gloomy death, knowing that the Man was among them who had called His friends from their graves? He who has done all things well, will also do all things well. He will also establish the kingdom of God which He preached; who can hinder Him?

So thought those happy people. It would be well if we also could speak thus. We are not in this frame of mind every day; but God gives us days and hours of exaltation, when we become conscious of the irresistible power of His love, when our hearts are ashamed of their stubbornness and their faint-heartedness, and when our lips would lie, if they did not say: "He hath done all things well." Oh that God would be gracious unto us, and make this hour of our gathering together such an hour of uplifting and of lasting blessing! We too may learn to say: "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has done all things well through His Son, and it only remains for us to give humble thanks." We are not without opportunities for

such experiences which would enable us so to speak. We have only to consider what God does before our eyes.

I.

What we see daily ceases to astonish us; therefore we generally reflect but little on it, and still less do we feel compelled to give thanks for it. How would it have been if we had all been born blind, and then one morning our eyes had all been opened so that for the first time we saw the sun rise in all his glory, run his course throughout the day from sunrise to sunset, and then set again in the evening in a golden glow. Suppose we had then learnt that all he does on the earth on which he shines, all the green which refreshes the eye, all the other colours which make the world appear so fair, all that grows upon the earth and that had nourished us blind mortals hitherto, could not exist without the sun which gives light to our earth. Should we not have been astonished beyond measure, and have replied to any one who said to us: "This hath God done, this He hath done for you;" "He hath done all things well; He hath ordered all things wisely, and hath cared for us with undeserved and truly Fatherly love." Is there therefore now less cause for wonder, for admiration, and need we no longer bow down in adoration because God's goodness and faithfulness are new to us every morning? Whoever has been permitted,

like most of us, to leave the dusty streets of towns and the close atmosphere of the workrooms for a short time, to come to the beautiful shores of the Baltic, not only to inhale the invigorating breezes that blow here, and to refresh his limbs in the waves of the sea, but also to cleanse his soul from the dust of work and the cares of daily life, he to whom all this is something unusual or absolutely new, must be affected and uplifted by it. If his heart is not deaf, he will hear in the roaring of the sea the voice of God who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that therein is; the voice of God, who rides upon the waters, and who cries in the ears and to the souls of men on the shore: "It is I who made it all." We are not distracted from these thoughts when we see men at their work in the midst of the grandeur of nature made by God; the fishermen sailing out on the high seas, and returning with their cargo of fish; the great ships cleaving the waves by the power of steam, while they shape their course in safety and pass by before us; when we see the light of the lighthouse multiplied a hundredfold by skilfully cut glass, and, like a guiding star, lighting the ships by night on the sea; or even when we hear the thunder of the guns which reminds us that men must protect against the incursions of other men that portion of earth that God has given them. All this need not disturb us in the thought that God made it all, and that He has made it all good. It is just when we have

received a specially vivid impression of the greatness of nature as the creation of God, and we see feeble and insignificant man disposing of all as if he were a lord, that we are impelled, like the Psalmist, to say: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?" for then the very contrast must incline us, like the Psalmist, to sing a song of praise to the glorious Name of God, who has made feeble man lord over all the works of His hands, and has set all things under his feet. It is true that we are not accustomed to speak in this way when we meet one another out for a walk. We then praise the invigorating air, the breakers on the seashore; we talk of the fine or bad weather, and then of one thing or another, while we hold our peace about what is best of all. But only the deaf are dumb. He that hath ears to hear the voice of God can also speak of Him and to Him. Here especially, where it has been our desire to meet together in the light of the presence of God, let us praise Him who made all things, and has made all things well, let us thank Him for all the joy He has bestowed upon us here. Let the old song become a new one in our mouths: "The Lord is a great God: in His hand are all the corners of the earth. The sea is His, and He made it. Let us worship and fall down before the Lord our Maker."

Such songs of praise to the Creator and such joy in His visible works are not matters which concern

every one. There are plenty of blind men who, from no fault of their own, have no conception of the grandeur and beauty of nature, and there are men who are born dumb, and who have only stammering tongues. In this our watering-place there are many sick and infirm people, who are conscious of possessing but little of the strength which God gave to man that he might conquer the world and subdue nature; who are even ready to rejoice when their pain lessens, and their weakness does not increase. Are they ready to say: "God has done all things well"? At all events, every one in whom there is still some sense of religion can say: "It is God who apportions, according to His will, all the blessings and strength of bodily life. The same God who so skilfully prepared the eye and the ear, and who gave to man not only bodily strength, but also the power of invention, so that he may feel and also show that he is lord of creation, made also the deaf to be deaf, the blind blind, the sick sick," and what God does is well done, His will is righteous. So speaks the judgment of every one who is thus tried and laid aside, but who still has faith in the Father of Heaven and in His pity on all His children, and indeed on all His works. So speaks man's judgment, but his heart does not assent thereto. It is no small thing in itself when a man does not murmur against his lot. A cripple needs real faith to be able to say: "All was ordered for the best for me when God

made me, or allowed me to become, what I am." A man who can say that is doing heroic deeds of faith in silence, which, in the eyes of God, may be greater than many a deed extolled by his contemporaries and by posterity.

But the exact opposite of such heroism seems to be the rule even amongst men who yet would call themselves Christians. And how are we to expect calm resignation and thankful contentment in those who are sorely tried and really laid aside, when we see those who are well stumbling over the slightest annoyances in daily life, and allowing their tempers to be disturbed? Ill-temper is incompatible with living faith in the providence and government of God. Faith is sure that no evil, either great or small, from the slightest mishap in everyday life to the most terrible calamity, can befall us without the will of God. We are very ready to seek for the cause of the disappointments that put us out in man's perversity, and it is certainly true that if all men were only good-tempered and ready to help, a quarrel would be scarcely imaginable, and with peace there would certainly be infinitely more contentment in the world. But it is just as true that the suffering and misfortune that befall us through the fault of man are nevertheless the act of God, as it is that God rules the world. God allows all to take place, and He allows nothing to take place because He cannot prevent it, but because it is His will that it should take place. Even the sin and wickedness of man

are controlled and guided, by the mighty hand of God, towards the goal which He has foreordained. All must serve His purposes, and therefore must be for the best for those who love Him. We have no excuse if we cannot bring ourselves to say, "What God does, is well done." How many of the most beautiful of our Evangelical Church hymns place this very confession in our mouths, and strive to draw us on to praise God even in suffering! How comes it then that even on the best of days, and in the happiest circumstances, we are often not even in a good temper, to say nothing of praising and thanking God for all He has done and is doing for us? This is not so because what God does is not good, but solely because we ourselves are concerned in the one thing that God does not do, and which has great power over the lives of men, and that is sin: "It is thine own will that creates in thee disinclination."

Our depraved wills hide the face of God from us, and veil the ordering of His fatherly love and wisdom. Our unforgiven sins make us uncertain whether God always means our good; and when we do not know this, we are also unable to acknowledge that God has made all things good. It is this inner discord that makes us so discontented with the world, and with the course of our external lives, and which even embitters the most innocent joy in the works of the Creator. It is well for us if we acknowledge it, and no longer seek the cause of our

discomfort in the perversity of other men, or in the management of the world, or in the incomprehensibleness of the Divine government of the world, but in ourselves and in our resistance to God's will. If we wish to make our peace with the world, we must first be reconciled to God.

II.

If we succeed in acknowledging joyfully that all that God does is well done, then we must look at the Man in our Gospel whose deed was acknowledged by the people as the work of God, and which they praised as well done. Like the multitude on that day, we must not stand gazing at one single deed, a single deed of kindness shown to a man who needed help, whilst ignoring all the similar deeds of love by which Jesus helped the suffering and the unhappy. We must fix our eyes, like them, on the whole of the Saviour's work on earth, and above all on the very kernel and essence of His work for the children of men. Jesus Christ did not come into the world simply to cause a few deaf men to hear and a few blind to see, and still less can it have been His intention to heal all those who were sick on earth, and to put an end to all bodily suffering. He came to seek lost souls, to call sinners to repentance, to proclaim the love of God, which is greater than all sin, to those whose evil consciences had made them turn their backs on God, as though God were their

enemy, and to enable those in whom He had aroused a longing for the grace of God, to obtain the forgiveness of God, and to let it speak powerfully to their hearts.

It is true that Jesus often sighed, as in this Gospel, over external suffering, which had been laid on one man or another by the decree of God, and, raising His eyes to heaven, prayed that God would give Him the right and the power to transform sickness into health. But He sighed most of all over the suffering of soul which we men are ever afresh incurring; over that blindness of heart which hinders us from recognising the things that belong unto our peace. He sorrowed most over the deepest cause of all, God's anger. Many only begin to see that God is angry when they feel His blows in their outer lives. But, bleeding and praying, He wrestled with the anger of God, even unto giving up His holy life as a sacrifice for the sin of the world. The wrestling of Jesus to obtain the grace of God for sinners did not remain altogether a secret of the Divine inner life, but was revealed to men in audible words and sighs and in visible suffering, so that some of them at least might realise the love of God which appeared in Jesus, and might become willing to yield themselves to Him. Those who thus yielded themselves to the love of God because they felt that it laid hold of them, learnt also to say: "He hath done all things well." The Cross, on which God offered up His only Son, is the place where sinful man can feel most certain of the love of God. It is thither that we

must return again and again, when in our own lives, and in the course of the world which is around us, we lose sight of the love of God.

Even the heathen, who as yet knew not the reconciliation of the world by Christ, were expected to seek for God the Lord in creation and in history, if they might so much as feel after Him and find Him; for He is not far from any man. God still speaks in sundry and divers ways to the children of men; God is mindful of many who are not thankful; but plainly and unmistakably overcoming all honest doubt, and putting all sincere objections to shame, He has spoken to us first by His Son, our Saviour. He speaks to us to-day through Jesus Christ in every word of Gospel teaching that touches our hearts, in every absolution that we long for with our hearts and accept with faith. Thus we can be as certain of the love of God as of His anger against sin. There also are to be found the roots of our strength in the conflict of earthly life, and there, too, the sources of our joy and of the certainty of victory over the evil with which we are burdened. Every one agrees that it is a precious thing to have the heart fixed in this changing, uncertain life. But we so often forget that this only comes to pass by grace, the same eternal grace of God, which has brought us forgiveness of our sins through Christ. We imagine again and again that outward changes must make us happy, and, though we do not venture to say so, yet we think often enough, that

God ought to deal with us otherwise, that we may be able to say: "He hath done all things well."

But how would it help us if Jesus were now to pass through our land, and literally to make all sick people well, to allow no more men to die, and to take away from all men all labour and anxiety about their daily bread, if He is not the Saviour of souls, who has taken upon Him all labour and anxiety about our eternal life? This world would still be a hell if it were not reconciled to God, and if the love of God which forgives sins had not found faith in the hearts of men, ordained peace, and awakened unfeigned love for God and the brethren. It would then indeed have been impossible for any one to say that all had been ordered for the best, for the deepest cause of all discontent and unhappiness would have existed as before. If we are certain that God sent His only Son into the world for us, and offered Him even unto death for us, then we cannot any longer give way to the fear that God grudges us anything that is good. The heathen spoke of the envy of the gods; we Christians cannot doubt the ungrudging love of God for man, when we have once recognised His love for sinners in the life and death of our Saviour. There we learn to look at our life in this world in the light in which God sees it. All that God does and allows to come to pass is subordinate to His gracious will for us. He wills that we should be and should remain His children, free from the world, that tempts and deceives us, that crushes and torments us, and

therefore free and blessed, at peace with Him who governs the world. Neither does He leave us without experiences which show us that all things must be for the best for us. Even our sinful errors, of which we are justly ashamed, appear to us then in a subdued light when they have been forgiven, and we have rid ourselves of them by the grace of God. God knows even how to turn our sins so that they may at last serve a good purpose. We often thought to do evil, but God hath made all things well.

III.

This is a blessed experience, but who possesses it every day? We have not yet overcome all obstacles by the bold assertion of faith that God hath done all things well, through Jesus Christ, and that all things must turn out well for those who love God. Before Jesus healed him, the deaf and dumb man was not sure that God had done all things well for him. Where is the mother to whom it does not seem as though a two-edged knife had pierced her heart, when she gradually discovers that her child is born into the world either deaf, blind, or an idiot? It is just those whose minds and limbs are whole, and who have also preserved thankful hearts, who cannot see the suffering of their neglected and incurable fellow-men without a painful sense of sympathy. The most religious Christian is dumb, and has

no answer to give to the question, why God ordains and permits all the fearful accidents to come to pass in the world, that the newspapers relate every week. Whether it be a human crime, or the violence of nature, causing the disaster which sweeps away the good and evil indiscriminately, we feel, when hearing of such daily occurrences, as in the presence of so many unsolved riddles. Just because we believe in the boundless love of God for men, which has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and for that very reason, we are tormented because we cannot trace that love in all the horrors we hear of every day. And when we look up to our Lord, as we see Him placed again before our eyes in the Gospel for to-day, we cannot acquiesce in a world so full of incomprehensible suffering, and so full of the powerlessness of all that is good; we cannot allow that it is a clear mirror of the love of God.

Neither ought we to do so. For why did Jesus make hundreds of sick and crippled whole, if He only meant to preach that man was to be content with the inner working of the grace of God, that he was to be joyful also in affliction? Were, then, all these acts of our Saviour only figures and parables? It is true that the Gospel teaches us renunciation of the world and of self, self-sacrifice and submission. It demands persevering patience even under the worst conditions of life. On the way to the Cross Jesus said to His disciples:

"If any man will follow after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross." But we should rob the Gospel of its truth and power, were we to abridge it arbitrarily, and so confine its demands to patient renunciation. As there can be no true preaching of the Cross without the proclamation of the Resurrection, so it is no longer Evangelical faith, if, in the picture of the Cross-bearer, we forget Jesus the Benefactor and miraculous Physician of suffering men. His deeds of healing were not only a few instructive examples of the doctrine He proclaimed, but real deeds of merciful love, so helpful, so powerful, and so numerous, that the world had never seen the like before. The half of His power and His time Jesus devoted to this occupation; He worked as a Physician much sought after, till far on into the night, and till His strength was exhausted. His cures did really banish pain from the lives of many sufferers; they, for their part, really raised the curse under which sin has placed us, and under which the godly as well as the ungodly must groan in this life. They were the deeds of the same Teacher who had said that it were better to enter into life maimed, than with a whole body to be cast into hell, and that the kingdom and righteousness of God were the only goal worth striving for in the life of man. The same Lord, who renounced all temporal joys which He might well have had, and who chose the Cross, in order to win the grace of God

for sinners, and to open Paradise to the dying thief, gave health of body and temporal joy to hundreds of hearts and homes. How can we doubt, then, that the love of God embraces both our souls and bodies? Jesus' miracles of healing prophesy to us of a future world, in which there will be no deaf and blind, and, in fact, no more sickness and no more pain, not a world of disembodied spirits who need no eyes and ears, but a world of men, who are redeemed both in body and soul. The Saviour of sinners is also the Redeemer from all evil; He who died on the Cross is also the Resurrection and the Life of all the dying and the dead. Therefore, that we might believe this, Jesus went about as the Physician of those who were sick in body, and therefore we thank Him also for these deeds of His love; they help us to trust in Him, even when He allows us to suffer and tells us that His grace is sufficient for us. May our Lord's deeds of healing not be in vain for us all, but as often as they are placed before our eyes by the Gospel may we be strengthened thereby in the hope of the future world, where all tongues, loosened from the chains of doubt, may thankfully confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, who hath done all things well. Amen.

XVI.

FREEDOM FROM CARE.

"*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold fast to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*"—MATT. *vi.* 24–34.

XVI.

FREEDOM FROM CARE.

AMONGST the commandments of Jesus there are some which sound as though we were invited by some one to climb a high and steep mountain with him. Most people are content to view the steep heights from below, and to marvel at bolder mountaineers. They remain below themselves, and say: No ordinary Christian man can ascend such heights, and we are neither saints nor heroes. There are other commands of the Lord which sound so simple and moderate, so easy and self-evident, that we might almost imagine it unnecessary to add a single word of explanation or encouragement; every one of any sense or any piety must say "Yea" and "Amen" to them, and act accordingly. My friends, to which of these two classes of Christ's commands would you reckon the words of our text for to-day to belong? Are the commands we have just heard difficult or easy? that we must serve God only and not mammon, that we are not to be anxious, that we are to seek the kingdom of God, and leave all else to God? The Lord has proved the truth of these His requirements clearly

and convincingly enough. Every child must say He is right. It is impossible to serve God and mammon at the same time, it really cannot be done; it is also very foolish to be anxious; it is easy to believe that God cares for us in all things. And yet, my beloved, what mature Christian can say: "To me it is a matter of course; I have not only learnt this from my youth, but I have also done it, so that to live free from care on earth as a child of the Father in Heaven, and, like a bird in the branches, to sing joyfully of the goodness of God, who has given me all, has become my second nature." The commands of the Lord Jesus are not all hard for those who believe in Him and love Him, and they are not intended to be a hard yoke or a heavy burden to any one; but yet for those who grasp them in their innermost sense, and desire to fulfil them truly, they are so deep and so high, that the greatest here below cannot say: "I am equal to them." But they are only incomprehensible and unacceptable to those who do not really wish to be religious.

There are baptized heathen, who have not yet resolved to serve one Lord at all times. They cannot, indeed, entirely evade the laws of the State, if they wish to escape serious difficulties. Nor can they break through the still stronger laws of nature. They cannot undo what has come to pass; they cannot prevent what is going to happen; they cannot escape their fate. And yet,

in their innermost hearts, they imagine that they are their own masters; and that from this firm citadel, by their independent actions, they may assert their own wills in spite of the laws of the world. If they are rich, they fancy they possess means whereby they may escape from the servitude of care and dependence on other men. And all the time they do not see that they are the servants of the very mammon that they look upon as their obedient servant. In order to preserve and increase it, they must do much that is unpleasant to them, and they must be as full of care as the poorest man, who lives from hand to mouth. When, however, mammon fails them, then they see that they have been serving an idol that cannot help its slaves when they most need its help. And this is only one of the many idols which are served by those who do not want to make the only true God the Lord of their lives. There is honour that man craves, and fashion from which he dare not withdraw himself. There are sensual pleasures whose destructiveness is better known to man than he cares to acknowledge to himself; there is the bad habit from which a man would so gladly be freed. And when man has served this lord long enough, then comes Death, before whom all tremble as worthless servants, even before he arrives, and in whose presence, when he comes, all man's imaginary self-glorification actually crumbles away. Jesus has not, indeed, much to say to those who imagine they are their own masters,

and least of all that which He says to us to-day. He says it to His disciples, He preaches it to His community. Only they who acknowledge God as their Lord, and who desire to live in the kingdom of God, which He has founded on earth by Jesus Christ, and under Him as their King for time and for eternity, only they can understand the Gospel for to-day and live in conformity with it. But to us also, who wish to be Christians, whether we be young in years and children in understanding, or have grown grey in the practice of Christian godliness, to us all it is said by the Lord whose name has been named over us: "*If ye wish to be blessed in time and eternity, ye must give up care.*"

It is thus that I think I can gather up in one the actual contents of the text. I shall endeavour to unfold its riches, by saying—

First: *A Christian must not be anxious.*

Secondly: *A Christian cannot be anxious.*

Thirdly: *A Christian will not be anxious.*

I.

A Christian must not be anxious. We learn this directly from our text: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on." Be not anxious, saying the things which those who are full of care are in the habit of saying. "Be not anxious for the morrow." This command has been often explained to us from our youth, and has been impressed upon

us, as hardly any other, in the beautiful old hymns of our Church, so that any misunderstanding is scarcely possible. It is true that our German word (*Sorge*) is ambiguous; it means something which is very good and necessary, but also something which is very wrong and foolish. The man who works at his calling that he and his may not starve or beg; the mother who tends and educates her children, in order that they may become skilful in body and mind, so that some day they may be able to support themselves in the world; the farmer, who thinks in winter of the summer, and in spring of autumn; the youth, who during his life as a student thinks of the time which is coming, when he will have to provide for himself and others with the interest of the mental capital he is now beginning to gather together; the statesman, who fixes his eye on every germ of future danger for his Fatherland, and averts the misfortune which might possibly first threaten his grandchildren: these, in a certain sense, are all caring for the morrow, and are right in doing so. Such consideration for the future, and such active provision for the future, are only the opposite of thoughtless levity, and the fulfilment of duty; and if such work is sanctified by prayer, God's good pleasure and blessing rest upon it.

But there is also quite another kind of anxiety. The Greek language, in which the Apostles and Evangelists wrote, has a peculiar word for it, and it is used here. It denotes the division, the partition of the heart, the distraction of the mind hither and

thither, by all sorts of alarming questions and doubts about the uncertain future. This is the anxiety which saddens the heart, and makes the face gloomy, lames the power of action, deadens the spirit of prayer within us, and makes us displeasing to God and man. It incites us to be always asking either ourselves or others: "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewithal shall we be clothed?" The meaning of these questions always is: "We certainly shall not have what we need, things will go badly with us; I do not know how it will turn out, therefore no one ought to expect me to be joyful to-day."

If our anxiety were only confined to the things referred to by the Lord! But how many cares even they have whose daily bread is richly provided in advance, and for whom the question is really very remote, wherewith they should provide for themselves and their families. The same anxiety can find vent in other questions. One asks himself: "How shall I bear it if my illness grows worse? How much longer can I bear to see one of my family becoming hopelessly ill?" Another asks: "What am I to say if I have to speak in public? What am I to write if I must write? How am I to defend myself if I am attacked?" From the child who is afraid his school-exercises will not be ready, to the old man who feels the diminution of his strength and dreads every change, we are all daily in temptation of giving way to tormenting care. It seems more natural to the heart of man in this changing life to be anxious than

to hope. But there is One who cries to us in this changing life, and whose words will not pass away: Be not anxious! ye, who have any trust in My Word, must not be anxious, for it is foolish and useless, yea, it is more, it is sinful and godless.

We learn by experience that anxiety is foolish and useless. Even a fool does not imagine that by taking thought he can make one grey hair black, or avert any serious danger. That would be a glimmer of hope, and not mere anxiety. On the contrary, every one who is anxious must acknowledge that by his anxiety he only causes himself trouble which would not otherwise exist, that he only increases the weight laid upon his life by the mighty hand of God, that he spoils his joy in the goodness of God and His gifts, and shortens the length and strength of his life. When a difficulty has been overcome which has caused us much anxiety, we are ready to smile at our unnecessary cares; and every sensible man ought thus to judge in advance of all his anxieties, even if blind chance and heartless fate did rule the world and the life of each individual. How ought we then to judge of our anxieties, if we are ready to confess the first Article of the Christian Faith without any hesitation; we to whom Jesus speaks as the children of the Heavenly Father?

It is indeed godless and heathenish to be anxious; it means denying the God, in heart and deed, whom we confess with our lips; it means behaving as though He did not exist, as though He were not our Father. And yet He is our Father, because He

created us together with all His creatures, because He has given us our life and still preserves it. We cannot excuse our foolish anxiety by our short-sightedness, which prevents us from surveying the connection of things, and by our powerlessness to bring evil things to a good issue. We are certainly shortsighted and powerless; but one thing we know, though we cannot see it, and it can make us strong against everything that may threaten to oppose us in the world. We know the living God, before whose eyes the complicated and intricate mechanism of the world lies open and transparent, and in whose strong hand the threads of this mechanism are gathered together, and in whose heart the eternal Wisdom dwells which is well pleased with man. And we know something still greater about this living God, and we know it much more directly. He Himself has opened our eyes through His Son to see something of the grace of God, by which He forgives us our sins, that we may believe and know that He is our Father, who employs all His might and wisdom in the service of His loving will, in His thoughts for us, as our Saviour. If we have ever experienced anything of the grace of God, which through Christ has condescended to us, that we might be raised to eternal life, we must have been conscious of the power of God, which helps us on through all the changes of this earthly life to the eternal goal. And if our consciences tell us that we are bound to trust and not to mistrust the grace of

God, whereby our sins are forgiven, then we shall be conscience-stricken by the command: "Be not anxious." It is one and the same mouth in which there is no deceit, which says to thee: "Thy sins are forgiven thee," and "Be not anxious for the morrow." As often as we hear this old command repeated, we must also, conscious of our daily transgressions, humble ourselves before the Lord Jesus, who has given us this kind, loving, and easy command. And when, in His Name, we pray the Lord's Prayer, and go on from the petition for daily bread to the petition "Forgive us our trespasses," then let us also remember our sin, in that we have neither obeyed the Son nor trusted the Father but have been anxious like the heathen. *A Christian must not be anxious.*

II.

Again, a Christian *cannot be anxious.* It sounds as though we contradicted ourselves, when we say a Christian cannot do what we are all doing so constantly. But our Lord and Master, who knows us better than we know ourselves, says to us: "Ye *cannot* serve two masters; ye *cannot* serve God and mammon at the same time." Jesus had spoken before of the covetousness which lays up treasures on earth; and this sentence applies first to those men who give way to avarice, and who yet want to be religious; it cannot be; the two services do not agree. But the same sentence applies also to Christians who give

way to anxiety, and the Lord Himself has thus applied it. After saying to His disciples, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," He continued, "Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious." That anxious questioning of care, "What shall we eat, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" is the service of mammon; for it bears witness to an honouring, even an idolising of earthly goods, which cannot be reconciled with the honour and the service of the true God. It is the service of idols.

Let us only ask our own experience to what blessings our thoughts are chiefly directed. A Christian's first and last thought should be that he may receive the grace of God, that his sins may be forgiven, and may remain forgiven, that he may not consent to sin, that he may grow in holiness, that he may always do what is right, and that he may hold fast his faith to the end, and so be saved. But let us be honest: are these really the things about which we are generally anxious, when we look forward gloomily, and go sadly on our way? Many a Christian might well think with fear and trembling of the mental development and the spiritual welfare of his children. But is that really the anxiety which most oppresses the hearts of Christian parents? The man who takes a wider view, and follows public life in Church and School, in State and Nation, with some degree of interest, may well often feel alarmed when he looks at the present and forecasts the future. May God forgive him if he sometimes asks in doubt: "How can saving truth

triumphantly uphold itself against all the deceitful wisdom of our days? How can our holy faith be preserved for our descendants? When will the children of light cease being so inferior to the children of the world in common sense and energy? How is the Gospel to reach all the men who need it? How is the prophecy to be fulfilled that Jesus Christ will manifest Himself as the Lord and King of all spirits and of all flesh?" There are many honest Christians who now and then ask such questions with troubled hearts; but they do not boast that such high and holy thoughts stir their minds: they are more ready to rebuke themselves for faint-heartedness.

But are these really the anxieties which constantly rob our minds of their cheerfulness, double the vexations of our daily work, and cloud our joy in the gifts and goodness of God? I imagine our daily anxieties circle much more often round our own worthy persons and our earthly well-being. If it is not dry bread, it is perhaps the comfortable life to which we are accustomed, our own advancement, or the happy settlement of our children in life. Such things cause more anxiety even to people who are religiously minded, than their salvation and their sanctification, than the eternal welfare of their children and the kingdom of Christ. By our anxiety we betray how much we value these blessings. By our anxiety we make ourselves of less account than the transitory blessings which God gives to and takes from men as He wills, in order that they may use

them freely, as the sons and daughters of the great Head of all things. Instead of this, we bend the knee in our anxiety to the same idol as the miser and the thief. The godless man can do this because he has no other Lord and God. The Christian really cannot do it, for he is the child and servant of God; and a man cannot serve two masters at once, and least of all two such masters, who are so very different, and who yet both lay claim to the whole man. The delusion into which we fall, when we allow anxiety to find a place in our hearts, without giving notice that we intend to leave the service of the Lord God, is, that we do not perceive how we become the servants of all that is earthly, uncertain, and transitory, when anxiously and doubtingly we make the happiness of our lives to depend upon it. The service of God depends upon faith and perfects itself in faith; anxiety is unbelief and faint-heartedness. Where faith is, there the future seems even brighter than the present; where faint-hearted care enters, there all becomes dark. I know as well as any of you, that here below there is not one who is perfect in faith; for then he would be perfect in all things like Jesus, the Beginning and End of faith. I am speaking against that deferential tone which so many Christians use when speaking of their anxieties; it is a delusion into which they are betrayed by the respectable appearance of anxiety, as though anxiety were more in keeping with a Christian life than levity and love of the world. Our Lord teaches us to judge differently of the care which

weighs down the life of many a Christian, laming his work, and deadening his prayers. He pronounces it a heathenish sin and an idol worship, which is simply incompatible with a Christian life. Let us not beat about the bush, but acknowledge it to be, what it is, a poison that slowly saps our life. We ought always to give it its right name, and to fight against it to the death.

We must not be anxious, according to the gracious will of our God; *we cannot* be anxious as long as we think and live as Christians, therefore we *will* not be anxious.

III.

How kindly our Lord endeavours to encourage us in making this resolution! He does not confine Himself to showing us how foolish and sinful anxiety is, how incompatible with the best treasure of our lives. He shows us also how glad and happy in itself, how beautiful and pleasing to God and man, is the life of a child of God who is not anxious. He calls upon us to recognise the types and pictures of this life of the children of God on earth, in the life of nature around us, that we may realise how natural it ought to be to men to feel no anxiety, but only to trust. Behold the birds of heaven, they sow not, neither do they reap, but neither are they anxious or troubled, for, fed by God, they sing their songs and rejoice in their life. Behold the flowers of the field, they

grow and bloom without any trouble or compulsion, and rejoice our eyes and hearts with the pure beauty and the brilliancy of colour with which they are clothed by the great Gardener of the world. That the birds and flowers know nothing of hard work and bitter care, is connected, it is true, with the fact that they stand far below us, and that they have no part in the higher gifts and tasks which have been given to us men. But ought we therefore to be unable to learn anything from them? To-day the Lord Jesus places before our eyes only one of the many lessons which we ought to learn from the government of God in nature. We ought to encourage ourselves in the God who shows His goodness and His wisdom, His joy in life and in the forms of life far beyond the boundaries of rational beings, by bestowing life and well-being, form and beauty in lavish abundance on other orders of being, always creating them anew, and even allowing them to spring up anew out of the death of the creature. He is a Lord of inexhaustible riches; He is a Lord who is absolutely good, who blesses willingly where His gifts are most misinterpreted and misused, as man misinterprets them and misuses them, by turning away from the source of his life. And this God is our Father. We have been from the beginning very different in His eyes from the birds and flowers; and in spite of our sin we are still something

very different in the sight of God from the unreasoning creatures which know nothing of sin, but also nothing of their God. He has called us again to Himself, in His Son, from all self-chosen ways of error, and He has called us into a kingdom wherein we are to live eternally under Him as His children, knowing and fulfilling the thoughts of God, and enjoying God Himself in all His gifts.

It is true that this kingdom, which we Christians must go on seeking till it has fully appeared, is not of this world. It does not consist of eating and drinking, of dress and the beauty of life, nor of any one of the blessings of life, about which in our faint-heartedness we become so anxious. The first and most essential blessing, in this kingdom of God and of Christ, is righteousness, the harmony of our will and innermost being with the will of our God. Whoever does not first of all seek the righteousness which comes from God, and which is acceptable to God, whoever does not hunger and thirst after the righteousness of God, does not seek the kingdom of God to which God has called us. But whoever seeks this kingdom of God, whoever has accepted as his own will the will of God that we should be righteous and be saved, has also thereby banished earthly care from his life. For the kingdom of righteousness and grace is really established on earth, it is implanted

in this world, where flowers bloom and birds sing, and men work in the sweat of their brows, and feel pain and pleasure. We who are to be the citizens of an eternal kingdom are not spirits which hover about in the air, but we experience in our own persons the grace of God who wills to make us righteous and His children. In this bodily life He bids us, while working and praying, to do His will, and to seek His kingdom. This would be impossible, if He were not one and the same God and Father who clothes the flowers in their passing beauty, and who puts upon sinners the robe of righteousness; who allows the birds to rejoice in their transient existence, and who gives to us eternal life.

Let us thank the Lord that He has not disdained to speak of the birds and flowers, and not only of them as the types and figures of spiritual life, but of the very plants and beasts themselves, as the objects of the providence of God, who nevertheless is not their Father but our Father. He lets us gaze, in them, on the creative goodness and paternal love of God, without which we men, also living in the body on this earth, could not rejoice in the saving grace of our God, and serve Him joyfully during this life as now we can. It is just when we do not forget that we are of infinitely greater value than the birds and flowers, and we therefore seek first and last the righteousness and the kingdom of God, that the sovereignty

of our God in the lower realms of nature strengthens our faith. All for which we take thought, and which yet we cannot attain, is given freely and richly to creatures so much more insignificant than we are. Why should these things be denied to us, whom He has created and called, during this earthly life, to seek that which is eternal? If we do this, then all that is needful for us in this life must be ours; it is an addition to the gift of eternity which is a matter of course. Why should we doubt? Why should we be anxious? We would much rather not be anxious. The words of our Lord have been proved to be true by many of His followers who have sought the kingdom of God since the day of the Sermon on the Mount, and many have acknowledged it as their own experience for the strengthening of their weaker brethren. When the Lord sat at meat for the last time with His disciples, and asked them, "When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything?" they answered Him: "Nothing." And if the same Lord were to-day to enter one or other of our homes, where He has been a welcome guest for a long time, and were to ask the master and mistress of the house: "Have ye ever been in want?" do you believe that He would receive an essentially different answer? As far as my experience goes, the majority would give just the same answer as those first hearers of the Sermon on the Mount. But even if one or

another had painful remembrances of want and need, still they too would not refuse to confess: "We must bear the blame; for we have often allowed care to reign in our homes and in our hearts instead of the words of Christ." And who can exonerate himself from such perversity? Yet still I trust that we have all of us allowed our Lord to say to us once more to-day: "Ye must not be anxious like the heathen, and ye cannot be anxious and yet be My disciples." Let us all promise Him willingly and joyfully to-day: "We will not be anxious, we will far rather seek the kingdom of God by prayer and in work." Amen.

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